

S E R M O N S

O N

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

A N D

PREACHED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

B Y T H E L A T E

Rev^d. THO^s. FRANCKLIN, D. D.

CHAPLAIN in ORDINARY to his MAJESTY, and RECTOR
of BRASTED in KENT.

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S.

V O L. II.

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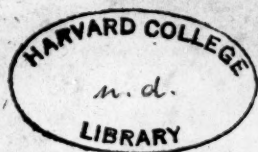
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C O N T E N T S

OF THE

SECOND VOLUME.

SERMON XVIII.

On the Parable of the Tares.

Matth. XIII. 24, 25.

*The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man
which sowed good seed in his field; but
when men slept, his enemy came and sowed
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OF THE
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S E R M O N XVIII.

MATTHEW XIII. 24, 25.

*The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man
which sowed good seed in his field; but
when men slept, his enemy came and sowed
tares among the wheat, and went his way.*

SUCH is the impatience, the ignorance, and the ingratitude of mankind, that whilst the manifold blessings poured on them by their divine Benefactor, are utterly forgotten or disregarded; the few evils which they suffer are most warmly resented, and most grievously complained of. The goodness and

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mercy of the Almighty are every day called in question by his murmuring and discontented subjects, who boldly arraign his Providence, and impiously accuse him of partiality and injustice: because it was in the power of God to have made men unchangeably and perpetually happy, they hastily and rashly conclude that he ought to have done so. God, say they, might, had he so pleased, have communicated to man a much larger share both of happiness and virtue, and rendered us throughout the exact image of his own divine perfection.

Thus argueth the pride and self-sufficiency of man, which dareth to dispute the wisdom and goodness of that God who made him. In opposition to these weak and impious suggestions, our blessed Redeemer hath, in the parable now before us, taken upon him to defend his almighty Father, and to vindicate the
divine

divine conduct in this important particular.

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The image which he hath thought fit to make use of in this beautiful allegory, is adapted, we may observe, to the meanest capacity, taken from an humble state of life, and therefore more proper to convey general and universal instruction.

God is here represented to us as a careful and industrious husbandman, cultivating and improving his farm to the best advantage, by sowing good seed in his field; after which he appointed (which, though not expressed, is visibly implied) proper persons to guard and look after it. His enemy, however, (and such the most innocent will always have) watching his opportunity, came by night, whilst the men slept, sowed tares amongst the wheat, and went his way. The consequence of

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this malevolent action was such as might naturally be expected: when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also; and the servants came and said unto him, *Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this. Then the servants said unto him, Wilt thou that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay; lest, whilst ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat also. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles, to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.*

Thus endeth this beautiful parable, which our blessed Saviour not only delivered, but did himself graciously condescend to explain.

He

He that soweth the seed, says he, is the Son of man : the field is the world : the good seed are the children of the kingdom ; but the tares are the children of the wicked one : the enemy that sowed them is the devil.

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The parable being thus fairly explained by him who doubtless was best able to explain it, it remaineth only for us, who read, to make the proper use of it, by such reflections on the various parts, as may best tend to illustrate the design, and to enforce the precepts inculcated in it.

And First, then : Those who accuse the Supreme Being as the author of evil, would do well to observe, that the husbandman represented in the parable sowed not evil but good seed in his field ; and in like manner also did our beneficent Creator, when he made all things, see

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that all things were good. But when Sin and Satan came into the world, they indeed polluted this clear stream, marred his divine work, defaced the image of God, and spread error, vice, and deformity over the fair face of nature.

God moreover not only sowed the good seed, but appointed also proper persons to guard and protect it. In spite, notwithstanding, of all his care and caution, the servants were idle and slothful; the carelessness of those who were set to guard the field, excited the vigilance, and ensured the success of their adversary: whilst they slept, the enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat. Here, my brethren, let us stop a moment to observe, that this hath ever been the case with regard to the word of God. The supineness and indolence of mankind in general, and particularly of those
who

who have been appointed to watch over and direct human affairs, have caused all the errors and innovations, all the sects and heresies, which from time to time have altered, polluted, and disguised true religion. These have assisted and encouraged Satan to sow his tares in the field, and cover it with those baneful and pernicious weeds which choak up and destroy the rising harvest.

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Our blessed Saviour sowed the good seed of the Gospel: his disciples watched it for a time, but soon grew listless and inattentive; when the enemy came, and sowed the seeds of error, atheism, and infidelity; these took root, sprang up, mixed with, and have ever since been growing with Christianity.

What then, my brethren, is the lesson which this part of the parable doth most natu-

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naturally suggest unto us? Is it not plainly and indisputably this? that we should be awake, vigilant and active; that we should not sleep as those did who were appointed to guard the field, but watch carefully to prevent, if possible, the intrusion of Satan: tares enough are already sown in the field; it is our business to take especial care that no more be dropped in it. When those to whom the guardianship of religion and virtue is more peculiarly intrusted neglect their duty, then it is that error and superstition, bigotry and enthusiasm, rush in upon us. To this we are indebted for Arians, Socinians, Gnostics, Popes, and Antichrists; for all the idle fopperies that from age to age have polluted the sweet fountain of Christianity. To this we are indebted for all the various sects and heresies, all the causeless separations, which have been made from the church
esta-

established. To this indolence and supineness, both of teachers and hearers, we are also indebted, I will venture to add, for the fashionable enthusiasts of the present age, whose absurdities it is easier to ridicule than to put a stop to; whose tenets and principles may produce evils which we are not sufficiently aware of, and be attended with fatal consequences which we little expected. The charge of indolence and remissness, which they lay upon us in excuse for their separation, may perhaps have some degree of justice in it: be it our first and necessary business to remove this objection by our future conduct: this may bring them back to the plain road of sense and reason, turn aside the waters of piety from these new currents, and teach them once more to run into their own purer channel.

But the chief end and scope of this divine parable seems, as I before observed

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to you, to be a vindication of the divine conduct, with regard to the permission and continuation of evil in this life. When the householder's servants desired that they might be employed in taking up the tares, he would not consent unto it, but said, *Nay, lest whilst ye gather the tares, ye root up the wheat also.*

In this world, so interwoven are the interests, so connected is the happiness, so dependent are the miseries of one man upon another, that it may be deemed impracticable even for Almighty power to discriminate and disunite them; or in other words, to chastise the vices of the bad, without involving the good also; the punishment of a guilty parent may heap undeserved sorrows on the head of an innocent child; a worthy and faithful servant may be ruined by the fall of a wicked master: if the licentious and
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abandoned profligate is visited by sickness and sorrow, he may bring poverty and distress on a whole sober and virtuous family. God therefore may, and frequently doth, withhold the vial of his wrath, and defer the execution of his righteous judgment, that he may not punish the innocent with the guilty, and whilst he gathereth the tares, root up the wheat also.

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But that the gracious disposer of all things may be clear when he is judged, by the permission of evil, God hath moreover most wisely and benevolently produced good. How many are there amongst the distinguishing perfections of human nature, which owe, if not their birth and existence, at least their growth, strength, and power, to those misfortunes and afflictions which alone caused the exertion of them. How would the patience

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tience and piety of the persecuted martyr ever have shone forth, but through the pride and cruelty of his oppressors! What opportunity could afflicted virtue find to shew her fortitude and perseverance, without the insults and inhumanity of successful vice! The frequent and impious violation of our holy religion from the malicious attacks of infidels and free-thinkers, have opened a glorious field to the pious defenders of it, given them occasion to display their talents and abilities in the fairest light; talents which might for ever have lain hid, and abilities that never had become conspicuous, but from the iniquity and perverseness of their adversaries. Thus doth the deformity of the tares reflect an additional beauty on the wheat, which appears more full and fair by being placed in the same field with them; and thus hath evil itself, by the providence of God,

God, been productive of the greatest benefit and advantage to us.

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But the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty, in this particular, will appear still more evident to us, when we come to consider, that in the general characters of men, good and evil are so blended together, that it is sometimes impossible to eradicate the one without destroying the other. Virtues and vices, follies and perfections, are often so united in one person, that we cannot without difficulty determine him as the proper object of our love and esteem, or of our hatred and aversion. It is highly incumbent on us, therefore, to be extremely cautious, lest whilst we punish the *faults* of our fellow-creatures, we do an injury to their *merit* and virtue also. In the field of human nature, the tares are so intermingled with the wheat, that

it

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it requires the keenest and most judging eye to distinguish, the nicest hand to separate and disunite them. How careful, for instance, should the parent be in the education of his children, lest with the tares he root up the wheat also! Who shall say whether, in stopping the growth of apparent prodigality, he may not eradicate the noble seeds of charity and benevolence, and fill the garden with the pernicious weeds of avarice and self-love? whether by curbing with severity the freedom and openness of youth, we may not destroy all its courage and spirit, and stain the ingenuous mind with cowardice and dissimulation? The suppression of anger and resentment hath not unfrequently been observed to introduce meanness and pusillanimity: thus may the mistaken husbandman impoverish that estate which he endeavoured by wrong means to improve, and with the tares root up the wheat also.

God,

God, we may observe, my brethren, hath in this particular set an example unto men, and most indisputable it is, that he would not delegate or assign over a power unto *them*, which he seems himself unwilling to exercise; it would ill become us therefore to attempt it. When weak and sinful men take upon them the office of extirpating evil, what additional evils do they always produce! How unable are they to distinguish the good wheat from the tares and weeds of the field! Can they know the secrets of the heart, or enter into the real designs and intentions of their fellow-creatures; Whenever men have thus impiously assumed the authority, and invaded the prerogative of their Creator, how dreadful have been the consequences of it! Who can reflect without horror on the sad effects of bigotry and persecution? Or what shall we say to that church,

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which, in direct opposition to the great husbandman, under a pretence of gathering up the weeds of heresy and schism, hath rooted up the fairest sheaves of innocence and virtue!

But the last and most powerful vindication of God's knowledge and justice is still behind, sufficient of itself to stop the clamours, and put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Omniscience alone is able to distinguish, to separate, and to reward: the divine husbandman knows precisely at what time the division is to be made, when both the wheat and the tares are grown to maturity, when they cannot possibly be mistaken for, or confounded with each other. *Let both, says he, grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them;*

them ; but gather the wheat into my barn :
 or, as our Saviour interprets it, *The son*
of man shall send forth his angels, and they
shall gather out of his kingdom all things
that offend, and shall cast them into a fur-
nace of fire.—Then shall the righteous shine
forth as the sun in the kingdom of their
Father.

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This gracious declaration, from the
 mouth of infinite wisdom, at once re-
 moves the veil which ignorance had cast
 over the determinations of Providence,
 and opens to us a full and fair prospect
 of the divine justice. Thus every doubt
 is cleared, and every suspicion banished;
 all the miseries and misfortunes which
 the introduction and permission of evil
 brought on the good and virtuous in
 this world, are amply recompensed by his
 superior share of happiness in another.
 He is moreover indebted to those very

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forrows, which he complained of, for that blessing which he is to enjoy, as they gave him opportunities of exerting those virtues which increased his reward. Whilst, on the other hand, the workers of iniquity, in proportion to their success in one state, are punished with more severity in the other: the longer the tares grow and flourish in the field, the easier are they rooted up, and with the fiercer flames will they burn.

To conclude, therefore: If we have any doubts or scruples concerning the ways of Providence, and the distribution of good and evil in this world, to the last and great day let us with all humility refer them, where every scruple will be satisfied, and every doubt removed. In the mean time let us patiently and piously submit to the divine dispensation: let us rest assured that the great Husbandman

man best knoweth how to cultivate and improve his own field, and doth not stand in need of our advice or assistance: that he therefore hath purposely so mixed the wheat and the tares in this world, as seemed best to his divine wisdom; that he suffereth the tares to remain until the day of harvest; that he will then make a proper distinction between them; that he will burn up the one, and gather the other into his own garner.

man will know how to cultivate and
improve his own field, and do not
stand in need of our advice or assistance:
that he therefore hath purposely to
mix the wheat and the tares in this
world, as seemed best to his divine will:
that he suffereth the tares to re-
main until the day of harvest: that he
will then make a proper distinction be-
tween them, that he will burn up the
one, and gather the other into his own
garner.

S E R M O N XIX.

ON THE

P A R A B L E

OF

D I V E S AND L A Z A R U S.

ON THE

P A R A B L E

OF

DIVEE AND LARUS

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of his children. Though his own arm
strengthened, and his own right hand

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powers of nature for their preservation
and support, yet both his works and

his wonders were forgotten by them.

Instead of admiring they disputed his
*If they hear not Moses and the prophets,
neither will they be persuaded, though one
rose from the dead.*

WH O E V E R seriously and impar-
tially considers the conduct and
behaviour of the Jewish nation under
their divine Law-giver, as recorded in
Holy Writ, cannot fail of being struck
with an admiration of his goodness and
beneficence towards a people so undeserv-
ing of it: he will perceive the Almighty
acting like a kind and tender father,
and will not behold without indignation
the pride, ingratitude, and disobedience
of

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of his children. Though his own arm strengthened, and his own right hand conquered for them; though he changed, suspended, and reversed the laws and powers of nature for their preservation and support, yet both his works and his wonders were forgotten by them. Instead of adoring they disputed his power, and doubted that very omnipotence which he had exerted in their favour. *Can he give bread also, said they, or provide flesh for his people?* He commanded the clouds from above, and opened the door of heaven to rain down manna upon them, and fed *them* with the food of *angels* who had not deserved that of *men*: and in return for it, while the flesh was yet in their mouths, they rebelled against him? their wickedness constantly increased in proportion to his indulgence, the greater his goodness to *them*, the stronger their aversion to *him*; and the
more

more miracles he performed, the less was their inclination to *believe* them.

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Such was the temper and disposition of that nation, which God, for reasons best known to his divine wisdom, had thought fit to mark out for his peculiar people; and that their temper and disposition was the same at the time of our Saviour's appearance upon earth, is indisputable. The Son of God experienced the same obstinacy, perverseness, and incredulity, which his Almighty Father had met with from them; they were perpetually asking him for proofs of his mission, constantly soliciting him for fresh miracles, which yet still as he performed had not the least effect upon them. The Pharisees in particular, who excelled their brethren in pride and insolence, were always demanding of him much more than he thought proper to grant.

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grant. To them therefore, in the parable now before us, he applies himself, rebukes in a tender and artful manner their pride, avarice, and infidelity; foretelling, as it were, at the same time, what did afterwards most exactly come to pass; namely, that such was their aversion to truth and righteousness, that it was not in the power of any miracles to recommend, or indeed of God himself to enforce the practice of them. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

A tacit reproach of their past conduct, and a visible allusion to his own approaching fate, seems to be the chief end and scope of this divine parable: but as various lessons of instruction may also be drawn from the various parts of it, I shall endeavour briefly to illustrate and explain the whole, and to draw from it,

as

as we pass along, such observations as may be most useful to us in our future conduct,

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The parable opens with a most beautiful contrast of riches and poverty. On the one hand is the picture drawn in the liveliest colours of a man in all the pride of youth, health, and affluence, a favourite of fortune even in the bosom of plenty and prosperity; *clothed with fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day.* On the other, a poor and miserable being, beset with ills, and overwhelmed with misfortunes: reduced to the lowest state of penury and sorrow: Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate, full of sores, with a body cruelly distempered, and a mind, no doubt, fallen, spiritless, and afflicted.

In this condition, as we may infer from what follows, the rich man leaves him

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him to shift for himself, without affording him that comfort and relief which he might so easily have bestowed on him. The crime of the rich man was most probably that which too often disgraces the character of the great, an utter insensibility of the sufferings of his fellow-creatures. Lazarus desired, we are told, (but as we may suppose *in vain*) desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.

We have no reason to imagine that the rich man was punished (as we find him to have been) *after* death, because he was rewarded before, or that because he had *good* things in *this* life he met with *evil* things in the *other*: that were indeed to doubt the goodness and to arraign the justice of the Most High. God loveth the chearful giver, and doubtless the chearful receiver also. Not to taste
of

of the feast which he has set before us, SERM.
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would be ingratitude, and not to enjoy
would be to disobey. But then it is our
duty to invite others also to the banquet:
God would not have punished the rich
man for faring sumptuously, if he had
fed the hungry; nor for wearing purple
and fine linen, if he had clothed the
naked also.

But to proceed: *It came to pass*, says
the parable, *that the beggar died.*

The consequence of the rich man's insensibility and neglect was, that Lazarus could no longer support his wretched being: death took possession on, freed him from all his pains and afflictions, and conveyed him, as we shall find, to a world very different from that which he had so long inhabited.

The rich man also, in spite of all his honours, riches, and power, did not long survive

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survive him: though he fared sumptuously every day; and perhaps indeed *because* he did so—he perished: all his power and splendor could not procure a respite, nor all his riches purchase a moment for him.

And now let us mark, with an eye of concern and astonishment, the dreadful vicissitude, and let the melancholy change afford a lesson of instruction to us.

The beggar is not only relieved from all his wants and calamities, but conveyed to the regions of joy and happiness: the ministers of God himself are employed to transport him thither, and the favourite of the Almighty is commissioned to receive him—*he was carried*, says the parable, *by the Angels into Abraham's bosom.*

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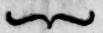
The rich man, on the other hand, is hurried away from the possession of all that he held dear and valuable, stripped of his wealth and honours, and transported to a scene of misery and horror; from the gaudy pleasures of plenty and prosperity, to the gloomy and uncomfortable regions of pain and sorrow. To complete his woes, and aggravate his misfortunes, the first object which his eyes behold is that which he least desired to see; that very Lazarus whom he had treated with such contempt, no longer poor and miserable, but abounding in treasures which life could never give, nor death take away from him. He finds him in the society of blessed spirits, with the great patriarch Abraham, whose piety he had probably imitated, and whose example he had steadily pursued. He saw *Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom*. How greatly must the bliss

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of the one, and the misery of the other, be heightened by a reflection on so astonishing a change in the circumstances of both! To Abraham, therefore, the rich man applies for a momentary relief: he applies to *him* from whom notwithstanding he could not rationally expect any. But such is the weakness of human nature; when we are in distress we catch at every reed, and solicit aid and assistance where we have scarce a probability of meeting with it. *Send Lazarus*, says he, *that he may dip his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame!* How humble is the prayer of misery! and how soft is the voice of affliction! He asks but a little comfort, and yet even that little is refused him. *Remember, Son*, says the Patriarch, *that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

mented. This was doubtless the severest answer which he could possibly have made: because nothing we know by *daily* experience, can so enhance and embitter present misery, as the grating and cruel remembrance of past felicity. To soften perhaps in some measure the severity of this reflection, he adds at the same time, that even if he *had* the inclination, he had not the *power* to serve him; an answer which blasts all his hopes, and cuts off all means of redress: *Between me and thee, says he, there is a great gulph fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*

That portion of the parable now under our consideration may suggest to us the most useful and important lesson—that lesson which is so oft inculcated in the word of God; namely, that this world

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is a scene of probation, and the other of reward: that when the gates of life are once closed upon us, none can open but he who made them: that, as the wise man says, *there is no wisdom, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave whither we are going. As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more.*

The great business of our lives, therefore, is to prepare for the end of them. It is in this world only that the good and evil have any communication with each other, for in the next, neither the felicity of the blessed, nor the torments of the miserable, will admit of any interruption. We have, as it were, but a day wherein to work out our salvation: an hour of it therefore, a minute, is too much to throw away, lest the darkness steal insensibly upon us, the night come
wherein

wherein no man can work, and we be quickly swallowed up in darkness and the shadow of death.

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Such indeed was the fate of the rich man in the parable: the answer which he received from Abraham must doubtless have filled his heart with all the agonies of horror and despair. He begins now to reflect that, to make him still more unhappy, those whom he had left behind him, whom he had long loved and associated with, would most probably follow *his* example, and consequently meet with his reward: a thought which aggravated his misfortunes, and inclined him, in spite of the ill success of his former petition, to make a second to Abraham, and to desire him to "send Lazarus to his brethren, lest they also should come into that place of torment." And this is a circumstance

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we cannot well pass over without making the following reflection.

How careful ought we to be in all our words and actions, to consider not only their immediate tendency and effect, but also the remoter and less visible consequences of them. Vice and folly are not confined to the person of the offender, but reach much farther, and affect others as well as ourselves; (for, as in the body, even after the distempered limb is cut off, the poison may spread itself into other parts of the frame, in the same manner) our principles and practice may not only affect *us*, but those also whom we are conversant with, and those who come after us: so that we may transmit our follies to such as are yet unborn, and intail our vices on the latest posterity.

It becometh all men therefore, but above all it becometh the rich and powerful,

erful, to act with the utmost prudence and circumspection; they should consider the power of their authority, and the influence of their example; that their vices are not only pernicious to themselves, but that they contribute towards the degeneracy of the age; that they may corrupt not only the present, but the rising generation, and spread the contagion even unto future ages. How careful therefore should they be in their conduct and behaviour in this life, lest, when they go down to the grave with the rich man in the parable, they wish for some one, but find none, who will return to their brethren, and keep them also from the place of torment.

So strange and so unreasonable was the rich man's request, that we need not wonder it was not complied with; have they not Moses and the prophets, says

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Abraham? have they not all that is necessary for their salvation?

The rich man had no reasonable answer to make, and therefore gives none at all, but resumes his argument, and reinforces it with, *Nay, Father, but if one come from the dead, they will repent; that is, I have been acquainted with them; they have imbibed my principles, and therefore will follow my examples: I can judge of their incredulity by my own; I know that Moses and the prophets are not in the least regarded by them; that nothing, in short, but some strange and uncommon appearance, striking on their outward sense, will have any effect, and they will not be convinced, till they are thoroughly affrighted. If one came from the dead, therefore, they will repent: a bold and confident assertion, without the least proof to support it,*
and

and which therefore Abraham as confidently denies, and with much more truth affirms that, *if they heard not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead;* or, in other words, if the knowledge of God and his laws, which had been graciously imparted to them in the holy Scriptures, had no effect on their lives and manners, neither would that appearance which he was so unreasonable as to solicit have any effect upon them; the same obstinacy and perverseness which made them despise the *one*, would prevail on them to reject the *other*: that it was therefore unnecessary to administer a remedy where the disease was incurable, or to hazard an enterprize where there could not be the least prospect of success.

To fix on the minds of the hearers the truth and importance of this conclusive

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clusive assertion of the patriarch Abraham, seems, as I before observed to you, the chief end and scope of the parable: I shall therefore lay before you, in the brief remainder of this discourse, a few of the many arguments which may be brought in the support and defence of it.

And First, then: Where one great and infallible rule of conduct is laid down, and that rule is sufficient to answer every end and purpose proposed by it, to produce others is entirely useless and unnecessary: when one guide is both willing and able to bring us safely and speedily to the end of the journey, why should we wish for more. God therefore, in the communication of his divine will to mankind, doth nothing in vain.

There is a certain degree of light which will present an object to our sight
in

in its proper colours, and whatever is added to that will render it but the more obscure; and so it must be with our minds also. Whatever is more than necessary to convince, can only dazzle and confound us.

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Scarce any thing, it must be acknowledged, could better satisfy the desire of prying into futurity, so natural to mankind, that what the rich man so eagerly requested: the return of a friend from darkness and the grave to light and life, must doubtless have amazed and astonished, but it does not from thence follow that it would have *convinced* the unbelievers.

The church of Rome, which hath always been ready to take advantages of the errors and follies of mankind to promote its own ends, hath not failed to lay hold
of

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of this natural curiosity, this love of the marvellous and astonishing, so constantly found in human nature. Men were continually soliciting them for miracles, and they are therefore continually forging them *for* the multitude; and, as if the real wonders which our Saviour wrought were not sufficient, have continued a chain of fictitious ones from those times even to this day.

But again: Is it not the utmost arrogance in man to call in question the conduct of God? Are we to direct the great Governor of the universe, or to guide the hand of the Almighty? What right have we to expect that the rules which he hath established shall be changed for our pleasure, and the great fixed laws of nature reversed for the service or for the amusement of a worthless individual? We may rest assured, that if *we* have no regard to the works of God,
God

God hath a reverence and veneration for his *own*, and will not disturb or confound them. If the Almighty were to perform miracles as often as men wished, and perhaps expect them of him, he would have no other employment: and indeed, if such a favour were granted to one, all might have an equal right to expect it. If God had permitted Lazarus to appear to the rich man's brethren, their children, and their childrens children, might with equal eagerness have solicited for, and with an equal degree of confidence required it of him. There are sharp and powerful medicines, which, when first administered, act very strongly on the constitution, but if frequently repeated, lose all their efficacy. And so it is with what works upon the mind: those strange and extraordinary proofs, those miracles which might perhaps in some measure convince the judgment, or enlighten the understanding, would, in a
very

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very little time, be of no more service than the common operations of nature.

Briefly then to apply this parable to ourselves, and conclude: The Jews were a people whom no king could govern, no God could please, no miracles convert. And the case is the same with our modern Infidels who reject Christianity: they have all that reasonable men can require: their understanding *must* be convinced of the truth of Christianity, but the passions refuse their assent, and will not let them embrace it.

They say with the rich man, send us one from the other world, to testify unto us, and we will believe. But had not the Jews Moses and the prophets? and have not these men the gospel of Christ? have they not already witnesses to confront, facts to convince, and miracles to confute them?

Were

Were messengers therefore to be sent from the grave, they would not believe them. Like those Jews who had no joy in the coming of Christ, though the news of his birth was brought by angels, yet were the tidings unwelcome to them. Thus the enemies of our holy religion would be still calling for new proofs; they would ask of God how he *made* the world, and how he *preserves* it; they would desire him to explain to them the mystery of their creation, and of their redemption; all those divine truths, which God hath reserved to himself, and which are therefore inexplicable by human wisdom, and unattainable by mortal reason.

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Shall man then, who was but of yesterday, reprove the Ancient of days? Shall he who sees but in part, find fault with all, or dare to correct that wisdom
by

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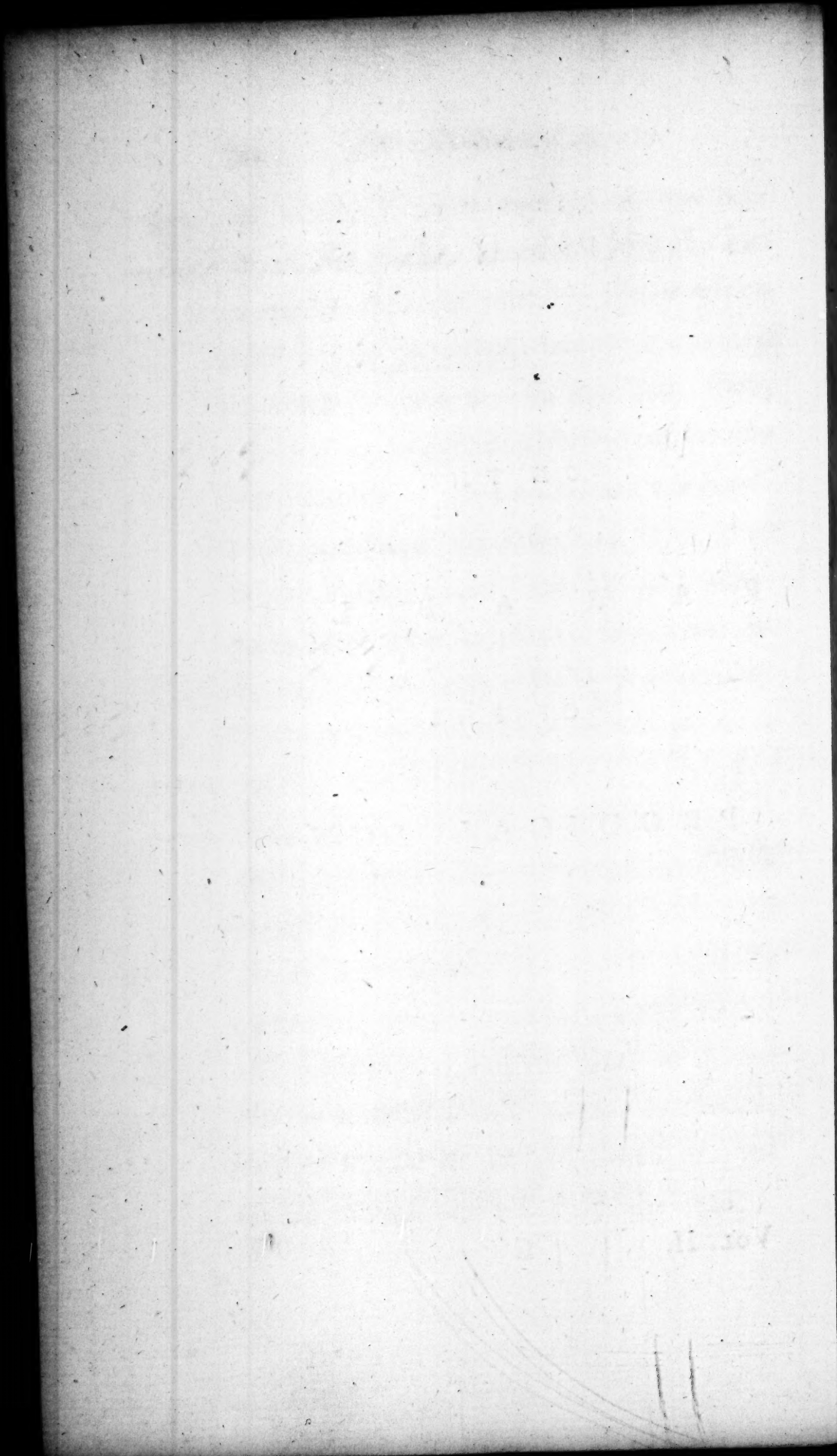

by which he was made? A day will come, we know, when all will be explained; there is nothing secret which shall not be revealed, neither hid which shall not be known. To that day, then, let us defer all our doubts and uncertainties. Let us not dare to suspect the goodness, or arraign the justice of God, but submit to his decrees, study his holy Scriptures, and believe them; perform, in short, our one easy task, *to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.*

In the mean time we may rest assured, that if our hearts are still obdurate, and turned against God; if neither his judgments have awakened, nor his mercies melted us to repentance; if we still doubt, and still deny; if we are not, in short, *already* convinced and *already* persuaded, neither should we be convinced or persuaded though one rose from the dead.

ON THE
P A R A B L E
OF THE
PRODIGAL SON.

VOL. II.

E



S E R M O N XX.

L U K E XV. 18, 19.

I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

WHEN our blessed Saviour condescended, in an easy and familiar manner, to instruct his followers, the better to insinuate his divine precepts into the minds of those to whom positive injunctions might seem harsh and disagreeable, he frequently cloathed them in the becoming garb of fable or allegory; deceiving them, as it were, into virtue, and at the same time commanding their

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attention by novelty and grace. His beautiful parables are all adapted to the capacities of those to whom they were delivered; though plain, yet elegant, and though simple, yet sublime; such, in short, as the most ignorant must have understood, and the most learned could not but admire; not spun out by tedious and unnecessary digressions, or obscured by phrases remote and unintelligible; not calculated merely to amuse and entertain, but designed to better and improve the mind, to convey instruction, and inculcate the most important tenets of his divine institution. And amongst these, there is not perhaps one abounding with more beautiful imagery, conveying more useful lessons, nor more clearly, or more pathetically expressed, than that which is now before us.

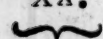
The Pharisees, whom our Saviour so often rebukes for their pride and hypocrisy,

crisy, were extremely surpris'd, and no less dissatisfied also, to see one who assumed the title of a Law-giver, condescend to associate and converse with men of the lowest rank in life; and what to them appeared still more extraordinary, men of bad character and reputation also: and they murmured, saying, *This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

Our Saviour, therefore, takes this occasion of vindicating his conduct, and explaining to them the nature and end of his divine mission, which they were, or pretended to be strangers to: they seemed to imagine (like the church of Rome, which to this day treads in their steps) that they were the favourites, the elect of God, and that none could possibly entertain hopes of salvation but themselves.

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He endeavours, therefore, to free them from such false opinions, to enlarge their narrow minds, and informs them, that he was not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; and that God, so far from refusing, would most willingly admit all to his divine favour, who with a true penitent heart, and lively faith, would turn unto him. That this was not only his most gracious offer and design, but that it was even pleasing and delightful to him, and that there was more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety-and-nine just persons who need no repentance.

He then proceeds, in the beautiful parable before us, to illustrate and explain to them the goodness of God, and to propose those terms of mercy and salvation, by which all men may attain what all men have, or ought to have, in view, their final and everlasting happiness.

But

But as these things were written not only for *their* learning to whom they were delivered, but for ours also, it will not certainly be an unpleasing, nor perhaps a useless or unimproving task, to run over, as briefly as possible, the principal circumstances and occurrences, as recounted in the parable, and to consider as we pass along, what lessons of instruction may be drawn from them.

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A certain man, says the parable, *had two sons*: of the nature and disposition of the elder we have no particular account, though from what is related of his conduct and behaviour, we may suppose him to have been a man whose passions were easily subdued by resistance, or artfully concealed by hypocrisy; one, in short, whose best of virtues were probably no more than what is generally termed common prudence and discretion.

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The temper of the younger was most essentially different: eager in his pursuit after pleasure, and resolved to sacrifice every thing to it, he said to his father, *Father, give me the portion of goods which falleth to me.* Hurried on by an impetuosity which too frequently attends this period of life, he desires his father to give up to him immediately, the fortune which he had most probably designed to reserve for him to a future day. Against his better judgment, the father is prevailed upon by his importunities, yields to his request, and divides the living. The young man, whose passions were vehement, grows impatient to launch out into the world, resolves no longer to be under restraint, but gets as far as possible out of the reach of parental authority, where he might indulge his licentious appetites without the least rebuke or controul. *He took his journey, says the parable, into a far country.*

And

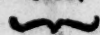
And here I cannot help stopping short, to observe, that the first false step which the prodigal took, was most probably the source of all his crimes, and the cause of all his calamities—he left his father. At the time when he stood most in need of advice, he left that friend who was best able, and doubtless most willing to give it him; and, what was still worse, he left him, we shall find, for misery and destruction; he left that which alone could save and protect, for that which was most likely to ruin and betray him; he left, in short, safety for danger, freedom for slavery, and innocence for guilt.

The moral from this portion of the parable is extremely obvious. In the days of our youth we should remember our Creator.

As soon as we leave our heavenly guide, we quickly deviate into the paths of error;

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error; from a disregard of God, and a contempt of his laws, arises in a great measure the licentiousness and depravity of the times we live in. Vice and irreligion go hand in hand, and never fail to aid and support each other: when the laws of God are broken in upon and despised, the laws of man are seldom much regarded. Besides, that though men are so ready to imitate the prodigal, by leaving their Almighty Father in their youth, they too seldom copy his example, by returning to him in their more advanced age.

It is highly incumbent, therefore, on every good and pious parent (and it is a duty of late very shamefully neglected) to instil into the minds of their children, as early as possible, the principles of religion and morality. The knowledge of languages, of arts and sciences, is
universally

universally taught, and inculcated with the utmost care and assiduity, whilst the noblest science of all, that of morality, the best and most useful knowledge, the knowledge of ourselves, is seldom enquired into. Care is taken to fill the garden with every flower that may beautify and adorn it, but not one useful fruit, or salutary herb, is planted in it.

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When the prodigal was no longer under the eye of his father, he gave a loose to his passions, and without the least care for the event, indulged himself in every vice and extravagance which his constitution inclined him to, his fortune impowered him to commit, or his inclination prompted him to enjoy.

But let us carefully observe the fatal and destructive consequences. He quickly spent all his substance, says the parable,
in

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in riotous living. The effect was what might naturally be expected, shame, poverty, and ruin! In a very short space of time, we see him reduced from a state of affluence and prosperity, to the lowest and most abject condition; left in a strange place, far from his father and friends, without the least hope of support or redress. To add to his misfortunes (a circumstance beautifully inserted in the parable) we are told there was a famine in the land; so that those who might have taken pity on him, were deprived of the means by this national calamity, which left no room for private benevolence. *And no man, says the parable, gave unto him.* Some there were, doubtless, who had the power, but they probably wanted the inclination. Men are too often glad of an opportunity of condemning, or an excuse for neglecting their fellow-creatures; and what better

better excuse can they have, than that
his own crimes have brought on him
their deserved punishment? It is then
they look on him as an outcast and an
alien, one whom the finger of God hath
pointed out as an object of his divine
vengeance; and why should *they* heal
whom God hath wounded, or why should
they seek whom God hath forsaken? He
is a stricken deer, the arrow is in his side,
and who will herd with, who will asso-
ciate or commune with him?

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Thus miserable was the unhappy pro-
digal's condition, with no acquaintance
but his own sorrows, no companion but
his own thoughts, which were continu-
ally reproaching him for his past con-
duct. Those, probably, who had been
partakers of his follies, did not think
themselves obliged to partake of his
misfortunes also. So soon are the bonds
of

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of guilty pleasures loosened and unwove!
while those of virtue (and those only)
are lasting and indissoluble.

When at last he awakes from his dream of pleasure, when the bitter medicine of affliction has recovered him from his delirium, how melancholy, and at the same time how pathetic are his reflections! *How many of my father's hired servants have bread to eat and to spare, and I perish with hunger!* He looks back with an eye of despair on those seats of ease and plenty which he has forsaken, and on that hospitable door which was now shut against him. His father's servants! even their state is to be envied in comparison with his own. They have bread to spare, says he, and I perish with hunger. He had, indeed, no reason to suppose himself entitled to forgiveness, much less could he expect favour:

vour: he had been guilty of crimes which would admit of no excuse, and therefore he does not pretend to make any; he had nothing to offer but promises, which he could not suppose would be believed.

His reception, however, was extremely different from what he had expected: the kind and tender parent receives him with joy and transport; the pleasure which he feels at his return obliterates the memory of his past failings; he forgets the prodigal, and only remembers the child; he even prevents his wishes, and makes himself that reconciliation which the offender had not dared to hope for. *When he was yet a great way off, says the parable, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

Such

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Such an instance of paternal tenderness and affection must doubtless have filled the heart of the penitent with as much pleasure as surprize, must have contributed in a great measure to strengthen him in his pious resolution of humbling himself before his father, and acknowledging his faults, of going to him and saying, *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

Here we see the chief end and scope of this divine parable. By the father is represented to us the Supreme Being, the great Lord and Father of us all; whom he, like prodigals, have most ungratefully forsaken, and most grievously offended; who yet graciously offers to re-admit us to his favour on our sincere and unfeigned repentance. Though we have rebelled against him, and are no
more

more worthy to be called his sons, yet he will take us once more to his bosom with all the kindness of a tender parent; even when he sees us afar off on our return to him, he readily meets us, and extends the arms of his mercy to embrace the penitent.

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What follows in the parable is pregnant with joy and comfort, a delightful scene of mutual endearments, and all the transports of restored felicity. *Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; kill the fatted calf, let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.*

What then is the conclusion to be drawn from this parable? Nothing less than the comfortable and delightful assurance that God will receive the re-

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pening sinner with mercy and pardon, doubtless on this indispensable condition, that we return to the paths of righteousness. If we expect to receive the prodigal's inheritance, we must be careful to imitate the prodigal's most sincere and unfeigned repentance.

Repentance is the only method of reparation the sinner is capable of. If we defraud our neighbour of his right, we can restore him fourfold; if we offend him in one point, we may recompence him in another: but when, by a wicked and licentious life, we have affronted the great Lord and Giver of it; when, by immorality and profaneness, by a total neglect of his word and commandments, we have incurred his displeasure, how shall we reconcile ourselves to his divine favour and protection? He has no wants for us to relieve, no passions
for

for us to gratify. Omniscience cannot
be instructed, nor Omnipotence obliged.
He is a judge whom partiality can never
bias, nor hypocrisy deceive. We can but
confess our crimes therefore, and throw
ourselves on his mercy; we can but go
to our Father, and say unto him, *Father,*
we have sinned against heaven, and before
thee, and are no more worthy to be called thy
sons.

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XX.

I cannot dismiss this subject without
a few reflections on the behaviour of the
prodigal's brother, as recounted at the
conclusion of the parable.

It seems to me extremely probable
(though I do not remember it has been
observed by any) that by the prodigal's
brother our Saviour meant to charac-
terise the proud Pharisees, who were so
extremely incensed at his converse and

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communication with publicans and sinners: and indeed *his* conduct resembled *theirs* in the most striking features, as it was doubtless a composition of pride, envy, and ingratitude. He was proud, we may observe, of his virtue, envious of his brother's happiness, and ungrateful to his father. When he hears the occasion of their mirth and festivity, instead of that joy which a kind and affectionate brother would naturally have expressed, we see nothing in him but fullness and discontent. *He was angry,* says the parable, *and would not go in.* And is it not just in this manner men generally act towards each other? The father, indeed, throughout the whole beautiful allegory, represents to us the exact image of God, and the brother that of man. One is grievously offended, and generously pardons; the other receives no injury, yet never forgives.

If

If the prodigal's happiness had depended on his brother, not all his humility and repentance would ever have gained his re-admittance. If God should act towards us, as we too often do towards each other, how dreadful would be our condition !

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Thousands there are whom human frailty hath misled into the paths of folly, who, like the prodigal, would gladly return to the road of virtue, but that these men place themselves at the door, deny them re-admission, and drive them back once more to the regions of vice and misery.

To conclude : What remains but that we bid adieu to our sins, that we break their bonds in sunder, and cast away their cords from us ? Now that we have health, vigour, and activity, before those

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days come, when we shall feel we have no power, when we must say we have no pleasure in them. Let us not then delay the great and important work. God hath promised pardon to our repentance, but he hath not also promised life till we repent. If the prodigal had missed the opportunity of returning to his father, which he happily made use of, he might perhaps never have met with another, and of course (surrounded as he was with calamities) perished unavoidably. As we are all of us great and miserable sinners, let us acknowledge ourselves to be so; let us prostrate ourselves in all humility before the throne of grace, and implore the divine mercy; *the sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit, a broken and contrite heart he will not despise*: if then we fall down at his feet, and in humble repentance say unto him, *Father, we have sinned against heaven, and before thee,*

*thee, and are no more worthy to be called
thy sons, he will yet receive the prodigal
to his mercy, he will graciously conde-
scend to meet us on our return with a
smile of tender complacency and forgive-
ness; he will bless us with peace and
tranquillity here, he will reward us with
everlasting joy and happiness hereafter.*

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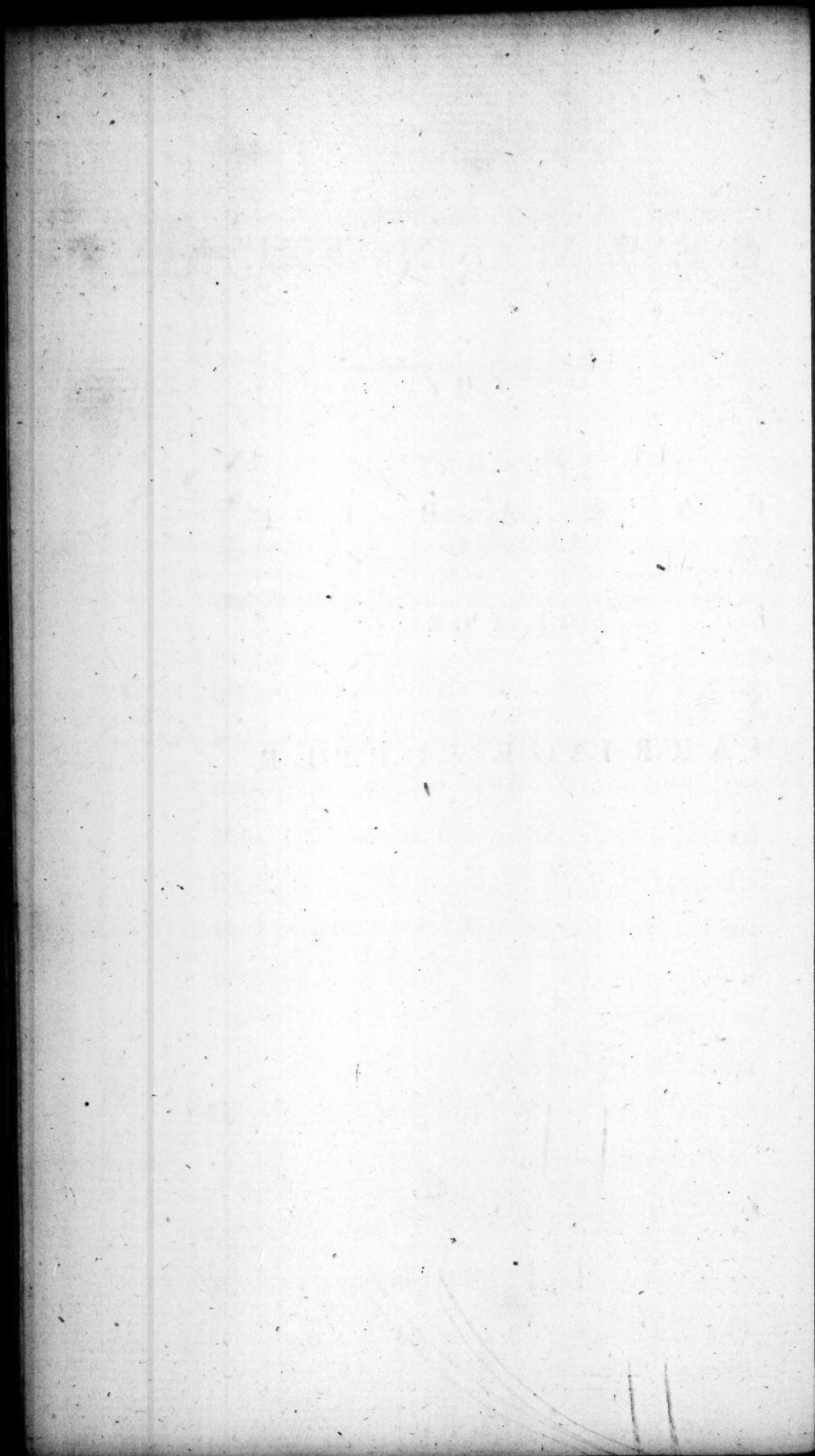
There are two main reasons why the President
has not been able to do more for the people.
The first is that he has not been able to
get the Congress to pass the laws he
wishes. The second is that he has not
been able to get the people to do what
he wishes. The President has been
unable to do more for the people because
of these two reasons.

ON THE

P A R A B L E

OF THE

MARRIAGE SUPPER.



SERMON XXI.

MATTH. XXII. 2.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son.

OUR blessed Saviour, who, during his short stay on earth, suffered all the evil and distress their malice and hatred could inflict, had, whilst he sojourned among the Jews, sufficiently experienced their invincible hatred and contempt of him: he knew that he should be despised and rejected, and that his ministers and servants would be persecuted and oppressed; he knew also, that though the Jews would refuse the terms of mercy and salvation offered to them, they would,

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would, notwithstanding, be embraced by the Gentiles : that the first, therefore, in the esteem of his Almighty Father would soon be the last ; and that though many were called, there would be few chosen. To convince them, therefore, that he was no stranger to the fate which he was ordained to meet with, nor to the manner in which their cruel treatment of him would be avenged on themselves and their posterity, he illustrates and enforces his knowledge of both by the excellent parable before us, which we shall see was most aptly conducted, and most significantly expressed of those divine truths which it was meant to inculcate.

In the prosecution of this subject, therefore, I propose,

First, Briefly to recapitulate the principal circumstances and occurrences, as recounted in the parable.

Secondly,

Secondly, to explain and interpret the several parts of it, in a manner the most plain and intelligible. And,

Thirdly and Lastly, to draw a few moral conclusions from it, which may probably be of service to us in regard to our future conduct.

And First, then, I shall briefly run over the principal circumstances of the parable as it lays before us.

A certain king made a marriage for his son. The celebration of nuptials hath, in all ages and nations, and among all ranks and degrees of men, claimed to itself a peculiar privilege of exemption from care and labour, and a more than ordinary indulgence in scenes of mirth and festivity: it was natural, therefore, to imagine, that a rich and powerful prince would solemnize them with
all

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all the pomp and ceremony suitable to so joyful an occasion; and accordingly we find him preparing a great and noble feast, and inviting his nobles and subjects to come immediately to his palace to taste his bounties, and to partake of his felicity. To these he sends his servants, to inform them that they were impatiently expected by him. *Behold,* says he, *I have prepared my banquet; my oxen and my fatlings are killed; and all things are ready: come unto the marriage feast.* After so gracious an invitation, one would naturally conclude they would most willingly and most gladly have accepted it; and that, as the king was so condescending, they would have entered into his gates with thanksgiving, and filled his courts with praise. But such is the perverse and wayward disposition of mankind, that what when absent we desire with eagerness and sollicitude, when present we refuse

refuse with slight and contempt. If the king had *not* asked them to the feast, they would probably have resented it as an affront: and yet, when he *did*, they considered it as an injury. They all, says the parable, with one consent, began to make excuse. Of all those who were invited to the wedding, not one would come. To preserve, however, some distant appearance of civility, to gloss over their rudeness as well as possible, and palliate their ingratitude, they began to make excuse. Reasons, we know, are always to be found, even for things the most unreasonable; and excuses are seldom wanting, where men have an inclination to *make* them. *The first said, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused.*

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XXI.

excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

Of these excuses it may be observed, that they were all such as carried with them a specious external appearance. Business must be pursued, the means of life must not be neglected; the several duties, relations, and connections of it, must be attended to. The truth of the circumstance and assertion could not, perhaps be denied, nor was the necessity of complying with it to be disputed: the excuses, therefore, must be admitted, though at the same time it was easy to see that they were *but* excuses: another day *might*, no doubt, have served as well to see the farm, or to prove the oxen: even he that had married a wife might have spared a few hours after his own nuptials to do his duty, and celebrate also the nuptials of the king's son; but the truth was, they were, as men generally

rally are, too deeply engaged in their own pleasures and pursuits, to afford any time or attention to those of others. Such was the behaviour of those who made excuses for their neglect and ingratitude; these, indeed, pretended to a reason, though they had *none*; and wore the appearance of a virtue, though they were destitute of the reality. Some, however, there were still more guilty, who threw off the mask of hypocrisy, and openly avowed their contempt. Instead of sending back the servants with lying and evasive answers, they fell upon them, entreated them spitefully, and slew them. What must have been the thoughts, and how great the anxiety of the offended king, on this occasion. This was a treatment which he doubtless as little expected as deserved: he determined, therefore, to let them know that he had power as well as goodness.

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When he heard thereof, says the parable, he was wroth; those who were murderers he punished as such; he sent forth his armies and destroyed them, and burnt up their city: *then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready; but they which were bidden were not worthy: very unworthy indeed must such men have been of an honour which they thus rejected: the master of the banquet, therefore, was resolved to invite other guests; Go, says he, into the highways, and as many as you shall find, bid to the marriage. Go out into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind.* A heavier punishment cannot be inflicted on the proud man, than to put the low and vulgar on a level with him, and raise them to the same degree of honour and esteem as himself; the incensed king, therefore, could

could not have thought on a method of resentment more proper than that which he here put in practice: he invites to his feast the very persons whom he knew the rich and great always held in the highest contempt; the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind. To see such men advanced to their rank, and supplying their places, would probably make them repent of their rudeness, and wish that, instead of rejecting, they had accepted his invitation. It is one of the infirmities, to call it no worse, of human nature, that what when in our own possession is in no esteem, becomes valuable when it is the property of another; and we cannot bear to see a rival, especially an inferior, happy in the enjoyment even of that for which we ourselves have no regard. *Bring in, says he, the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind.* These he had besides reason to

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imagine would gladly attend his courts, and be thankful for his beneficence; and as they had no claim to such an honour, nor expectation of it, it would moreover be more acceptable to them. Accordingly they received the message with joy, and crowded to the banquet. *And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room: And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and press them to come in, that my house may be filled.* Thus, lest those whom he had first asked, and who had so rudely refused, should now be inclined to visit him, did he take care most effectually to prevent their intrusion: he was resolved, we see, that his house should be entirely filled with *other* guests; so that if they attempted to come in, they could not possibly have gained admittance. *None of those men, says he, who were invited, shall taste of my supper.*

The

The consequence of this declaration, and of this conduct, were such as the master of the feast most ardently desired; *the servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests.*

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Thus was the generous and beneficent king at last happy in the dispensation of his bounty towards those objects whom he thought most deserving of it. One accident however we are told happened, which for a time interrupted the pleasure and spoiled the decorum of the banquet. *When the king came in to see the guests, he found there a man without a wedding garment; a robe, we are to suppose, which it was always customary to wear on these occasions, and which was always prepared by the master of the feast. Such an omission was, we are told,*

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highly resented by him, and he said to his servants, *Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; for many are called, but few are chosen.*

Thus endeth this elegant and poignant parable: a tale told with the utmost simplicity, but which yet contained several very necessary and important truths, as will most evidently appear, when we come to what I proposed, Secondly, to consider; namely, the proper explanation and interpretation of it.

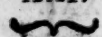
And First, then: By the king who made a marriage for his son, we are doubtless to understand the great King of kings, and Lord of lords, who, in the person of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ

Christ the righteous, proposed to man the gracious terms of acceptance through him. He invites first his chosen people, the Jews, to the glorious banquet of happiness and salvation, which he had prepared for them: but this obdurate and rebellious nation, who had already shewn themselves so unworthy of his divine favour and protection, now gave him a fresh instance of their obstinacy and perverseness, by rejecting the gospel of his Son, refusing to adopt his precepts, or to obey his commands: slaves as they were to their own lusts and passions, they pleaded *that* as an excuse for their neglect which could only heighten their condemnation, and not only despised his word, but persecuted his ministers and servants. Our blessed Saviour therefore doth, in the parable before us, predict many of those things which afterwards came to pass, concerning them and him-

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self also; and in the artful and well-conducted progress of it, foretells the expulsion and destruction of the Jews, and the admission of the Gentiles into his church in latter ages. By the halt, the poor, the maimed, and the blind, is shadowed out unto us the whole Gentile world, involved at that time in ignorance and error, poor in knowledge, maimed and imperfect in their understanding, blinded with prejudice and superstition: for these the feast was graciously prepared by their Almighty Sovereign. The glorious light of the Gospel, which like another sun shone upon all, broke thro' the clouds of Paganism, and opened to them a delightful prospect of truth and happiness. By those servants who were spitefully intreated and slain, are apparently pointed out to us the faithful ministers of Christ, his holy apostles, all his chosen servants, all the primitive saints, and

and the whole army of martyrs who fought his cause, who lived but to serve their master, and died in his defence. That city, which the parable points out to us as an object of divine vengeance, which for its ingratitude and cruelty was burnt up and destroyed, can be no other than Jerusalem, which for the sins of its inhabitants was given up a prey to the Romans, and which, according to this and other predictions concerning it in Holy Writ, was totally destroyed and overthrown, infomuch that not one stone was left upon another. A dreadful and stupendous event! An ever-memorable manifestation both of the truth and of the power of God. The Jews refusal to attend the marriage feast was unanimous, and therefore their whole city was destroyed. Their guilt was general, and so was their punishment: their obstinacy and perverseness were universal, as
universal

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universal was their ruin and destruction.

When our Saviour informs us in the parable, that the wedding was furnished with guests, we are doubtless to consider those words as prophetic of that success which the Gospel of Christ was to meet with in after ages ; though the Jews rejected, the Gentiles received his doctrines : Christianity was so rapid in its progress, as to astonish and confound those who had vainly imagined that all mankind would treat it with the same contempt as themselves. It was not without the utmost surprise, as well as concern, that they beheld such numbers assembled in that house where they had refused to come, and the table which they had despised, so crowded with guests. *None of those, says our Saviour, who were first bidden, shall taste of my supper.* This prophetic part of the parable was most remarkably and exactly fulfilled. By those

those who were first bidden to the marriage feast, as I before observed to you, are the perverse and rebellious Jews: *these*, says the Lord, *shall never taste of my supper*; and accordingly we find this obstinate and unbelieving people still continuing in their perverseness, and rejecting the Gospel of Christ. Because they would not come when they were first invited, the Lord will not now admit them to his table: he hath so hardened their hearts, that they are still strangers to his word, and as far removed as ever from his divine grace: a wandering, unsettled, miserable people, without a country to inhabit, a God to govern, or a Saviour to redeem them.

Thus far then for the explanation and interpretation of the parable, which cannot indeed, without manifest perverseness, be mistaken or misunderstood: but
as

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as these things were written not only for our information, but likewise for our improvement and instruction, permit me, in the brief remainder of this discourse, to beg your patience, whilst I draw a few moral conclusions from the parable, which may be of service to us in our future conduct.

And First, then, We are to consider ourselves as in the situation and circumstance of those who were first invited to the wedding : The feast of happiness and salvation is prepared, the guests are assembled, and the Lord of the banquet, even the King of kings, standeth waiting for us. He hath sent his gracious invitation to us, by the mouths of his chosen servants, by his apostles and evangelists, by all the ministers of his word : Shall *we* then, like the Jews of old, impiously refuse to accept it ? What excuse

cuse can we plead for negligence so inexcuseable? What title can we have to pardon for an insult so unpardonable? To say the truth, we but too nearly resemble the Jews in the parable; the same excuses which they made for not embracing the religion of Christ, do Christians daily bring for not practising the duties of it. *I have bought a piece of ground, says one, and I must needs go and see it.* That is, if he would speak openly, I am engaged in the service of pride and ambition, and have no leisure for any other duty; I am rising to power and grandeur, and cannot stoop to innocence and virtue; I am too busy, in short, in the views and pursuits of this life, to spare any time for the less important concerns of the next. *Another says, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused.* That is, I am thirsting after riches, bent not on
godliness,

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godliness, but on gain : it will be time enough, after I am become rich, to grow good, and to list under the banner of God, after I have fought and conquered for Mammon. *A third says, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.* That is, I am the votary of pleasure, and will acknowledge no other sovereign ; I am already set down to a sensual, and therefore have no relish for a mental entertainment ; too strongly attached to corporeal, to receive any satisfaction from spiritual enjoyments ; I prefer, therefore, the tumult of riot and debauchery among the sons of Belial, to the sober feast of reason and religion at the table of the Lord. Such, if men would fairly speak their thoughts, would be the idle frivolous excuses daily made for the neglect of our duty ! such they were in the times when the parable was spoken, and such they have remained even to this day.

day. When God invites men to his feast, there is always a farm to be visited, oxen to be proved, a wife to be attended. That is, ambition withholds, covetousness detains, or pleasure drives them away from it; the pride, riches, and pleasures of this world so engross our attention, that we have no thought of any other, no regard to a pride which is meritorious, riches that are unalienable, pleasures that are unfading and immortal. The Jews represented in the parable were an ungrateful and perfidious people: let us be ashamed to follow such bad examples. If we are not ashamed, surely we shall be afraid. Let us remember their fate, and rest assured, that if we are guilty of the same crime, we must expect the same punishment. If we reject the first gracious invitation, we must not dare to hope that he will ever send us another. *None of those,* says the parable,
which,

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XXI.*which were bidden, shall taste of my supper.*

If we refuse to accept the terms of mercy offered to us, he will send for other guests more worthy of his table, even the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Christ may one day adopt into his flock all those barbarous and savage nations who are yet strangers to his word: they perhaps will gladly accept that salvation which we refuse, and eagerly embrace that knowledge which we thus impiously and ungratefully despise. Even if we should hereafter be ever so desirous of coming to his feast, his table may be filled without us; his doors, which are now open to receive, may then be shut against us, and none of us who are now bidden may be permitted, however earnestly we solicit for it, to taste of his supper. Let us then, my brethren, make the proper use of the parable before us. We are invited to
the

the feast : let us immediately hasten to partake of it : let each of us put on the wedding garment of righteousness, without which we must by no means appear before our Sovereign. If we do not come as soon as we are called, if we are not cloathed as we ought to be, and if we do not behave ourselves when there in a manner suitable to the occasion, we had better never come at all. And lastly, let us remember that this feast is but preparatory to a better, even a feast of joy and happiness in the mansions of the blest, where we shall celebrate the marriage of the King's Son with songs of thanksgiving, a feast where the appetite will never pall, the enjoyment never satiate, and the converse never tire ; where we shall meet and associate with the spirits of good men made perfect, where out of the many that are called we shall see the few that are chosen, those happy and

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exalted few, who shall have left the insipid feast of human life, for an eternal banquet of peace and immortality; where they shall eat the bread of happiness from the hands of the Almighty, and quench their thirst in those rivers of bliss which flow at God's right hand for evermore.

ON THE
DEATH
OF THE
RIGHTEOUS.

H 2

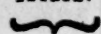
S E R M O N XXII.

N U M B E R S XXIII. 10.

*Let me die the death of the righteous, and
let my last end be like his.*

TH E confideration of our latter end, though a point of the utmost consequence and importance, is, notwithstanding, so constantly and so industriously removed from our thoughts, as seldom to enter into them: as death is the object not of our *hopes*, but of our *fears*, few, very few amongst us, can bring themselves to form any wish concerning it. Such is the folly and inconsistency of mankind, that whilst we are every day preparing against accidents

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which *never* may, we will not give ourselves the least care or concern about that which inevitably *must* happen; and it is with the utmost difficulty that any of us can be persuaded to learn a lesson which all must one day be obliged to put in practice. Whilst we are on the busy stage of this life, a mutual commerce of fraud and dissimulation is perpetually carried on amongst us, and the universality of the practice disguises even from ourselves the folly and the iniquity of it; but a time will come to every one of us, when it can answer no end to deceive, when it can serve no purpose to dissemble, when hypocrisy must throw off the mask, and falsehood lay aside her delusion; a death-bed detects all the sophistry of human artifice, unveils the hidden heart, and shews the man in his true shape and form.

The

The present age is so gay and dissolute, so immersed in pleasure, that they have neither time or inclination to visit the chambers of pain and sorrow; the bed of sickness has very few attendants, and the house of mourning is most industriously avoided, lest it should embitter the sweet draught of luxury, interrupt the course of our amusements, and lay us under the disagreeable necessity of being serious. Some indeed are obliged by their necessities to attend the couch of the sick, and to wait near the bed of death; happy would it be for us, if we could make scenes of this nature much more familiar to us; for few, I believe, ever returned from them without some improvement, without some serious thoughts, that had at least a temporary influence over their ensuing conduct.

Surely, if a wish is to be formed with regard to this awful subject, it must be

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that which is expressed in the words of my text, *let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.* However we may dislike the means, we shall all readily embrace the benefits resulting from it; however unwilling we may be to live the life, we should all be glad to die the death of the righteous.

Even amongst the heathens, who had such poor and uncertain prospects of a future state, the admonitions of a death-bed were not unregarded; they watched the last moments of their departing friends with the utmost care, and considered them with a kind of religious awe and veneration; they looked on every action of the dying man as instructive, on every word as prophetic, and as such listened to them with the deepest attention; but surely, if the words and the actions of a pagan at this important

important hour were worthy of observation, what should be our regard to those of the dying Christian, who has so much more reason to fear, or to hope for immortality.

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What then if we should for a while visit, though but in imagination, those scenes which would be still more forcible in reality; perhaps even a distant view of them may convey some powerful instruction. Permit me to introduce you to the chambers of vice and virtue, to point out to you the very different form which death assumes in each of them, and to give you an imperfect sketch of the good and bad man in his last moments.

Let us then suppose ourselves admitted to the melancholy couch of the profligate and abandoned sinner, at the dreadful hour

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hour of his dissolution, after a life spent in the service of vice and debauchery; let us behold this son of pleasure, now fixed on the rack of pain, this gay and thoughtless libertine sunk into the deepest sorrow, and groaning beneath the horrors of despair: he sees the hand of death lifted up against him, and trembles at the impending stroke; he beholds the grave opening before him, and shudders at the affrightning prospects; the wounds of conscience grow every moment more wide and painful, and the sting of sin penetrates too deep to admit of comfort or consolation; whilst memory holds a glass that calls to mind each word and action of his life, and as they pass in review before him, gives every one of them a dagger to plant in his heart. The prodigal, who had squandered away so many precious years, now pleads only for one added moment, but pleads perhaps in

in vain ; he is summoned hence by his Creator, his follies unrepented, his crimes unexpiated and unatoned ; he quits the dreadful scene in despair, horror, and confusion, and in agony launches forth into the boundless ocean of eternity.

But what his disorder *inflicts* is light in comparison of what it *threatens* : every pang which he feels is but an earnest of future torment, and the anticipation of eternal misery ; he considers not only that he is leaving a world of joy and pleasure, but that he is leaving it for a world of pain and sorrow ; not only that he is going, but whither also, and to whom ? to a God whom he hath long offended, and to a punishment which he has long deserved. Memory, which perhaps for a while had quitted her seat, returns with fresh vigour, to reproach him for those follies which reason could not

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not prevent. What would he now give for that insensibility from which he is just awakened, or that rest which hath now forsaken him. How sudden and how astonishing a change is now worked in him! he who had so long defied the power, or perhaps even doubted the existence of a God, now trembles at his justice, and implores his mercy; he who had derided the doctrines, and denied the miracles of Christ, now intreats for forgiveness, and sues for his intercession.

But let us quit an image which we cannot contemplate without horror, and turn our eyes towards a fairer prospect, and a brighter example; let us behold *that in another*, which we should imitate *ourselves*, and consider the *death of the righteous*.

Observe, as you approach his bed, the sweet composure of his mind, and the
calm

calm serenity of his aspect: he bears the pains of his distemperature with manly vigour and resolution; submits with patience to the feeble resources of human art, but at the same time relies only on the divine assistance, well knowing that when God calleth, man must obey: his soul, which is on the wing towards heaven, looks down as it were on the poor inhabitants of earth still doomed to the wearisome pilgrimage of this life; he longeth, with the holy apostle, *to be dissolved, and to be with Christ*. Thus, as his body sinks, his soul aspires, as his earthly and material part decays, his spiritual and heavenly gains more strength and vigour, till at length he rejoices in the separation, looks on the king of terrors with a smile of complacency, and with all calmness and humility resigns his life into the hands of him who gave it.

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*Ob death, where is thy sting? ob grave,
where is thy victory?*

Is there upon earth a being in all the pride of health, affluence, and prosperity, who would not envy the good man such an exit? This is a poor and imperfect, but at the same time a true picture of that interesting scene in which we must all one day be actors; let us consider then which of these we would wish to represent. Since none of us can tell how soon he may be called away from this transitory life, since in every short portion of our existence death may come suddenly upon us, surely we should always be prepared to receive him, that so we may die the death of the righteous, and that our latter end may be like his.

And First then : The striking contrast which I have just now set before you,
may

may suggest some useful reflections to the young, the thoughtless, and the gay.

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To call on those who are but in the beginning of life to prepare for the latter end of it, to talk of death to him who hath but just learnt to live, may indeed be deemed a fruitless admonition; and yet, such is the instability of all human things, so uncertain is the number of our days, that the caution is by no means unnecessary, the advice by no means unimportant. How often doth it happen that the promising spring of life, with all its delightful bloom, is at once cut off by some fatal unexpected blast! how often doth the undistinguishing scythe of death mow down the blossoms of youth and beauty! how often doth the unhappy father lament the unexpected loss of his beloved son, and the weeping mother attend her daughter to the grave!

If

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If we look back in search of those who trod with us the paths of life in our earlier years, where is the gay circle of our former friends, where are all the lively companions of our youth : how few of them shall we find ! how many of those, whom we remember flourishing like the green bay-tree, are now cut down, dried up, and withered. Were they prepared for that fate which so suddenly overtook them ? did they live the life, and if they did not, could they possibly ever die the death of the righteous ? Should we not then be every day and every hour preparing for that great event, which every day and every hour may produce : In the days of thy youth therefore remember thy Creator ; it may be too late for thee, O man ! when thy feet are stumbling on the dark mountains, and the shadows of the evening have overtaken thee !

But

But Secondly : When we arrive at the state of manhood, when our understanding is strengthened by judgment, and our reason aided by experience, when every day brings with it fresh convictions of the vanity of human life, one would think, men should naturally turn their thoughts towards something serious and important, should consider their latter end, and prepare themselves for it. And yet I know not how it is, but this period of life, though most fit and able, is of all least willing to receive instruction, to think on the one thing needful, and to prepare for their latter end. The passions have now taken deep root in the heart, and are not without difficulty to be eradicated ; we are so busied in the affairs of *this* life, that we cannot look forwards to *another* ; and yet a serious attention to this point is perhaps more useful and necessary at this than at any other period of

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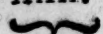

our existence;—this is the great crisis of our conduct which must determine our final sentence, which must fix us in the practice of virtue or vice: if we deviate from the right path in this part of our journey, we shall scarce ever strike into it again.—A God of mercy *may* pardon the inadvertencies of youth, but a God of justice will certainly punish the faults of our riper years.

Need I, thirdly and lastly, add an exhortation to those who are still farther advanced in life? can *they* want a monitor to put them in mind of mortality, who must every hour be more and more sensible of their approaching dissolution? Little will it profit us in that hour to have deluded a credulous world by specious appearances, or to have gained a *good* name, whilst we have deserved an *evil* one;—the applause of millions will
then

then be useless, unless our own hearts bear testimony to it: *this*, and *this* only, can bring a man peace at the last; and thus only the sun of innocence can gild the evening of our days.——Let those therefore, above all, who are so nearly approaching towards their latter end, most frequently contemplate and seriously prepare for it; for death is an awful and tremendous visitor: to youth, to manhood, and to age, the hour must be dreadful, and the trial must be severe; from the richest to the poorest, from the greatest to the least, from him that sitteth on a throne of glory, to him that is humbled in earth and ashes. Nothing can reconcile us to a parting with *this* life, but a firm, unalterable belief in, and thorough conviction of *another*; a humble reliance on the goodness and power of our Creator, and on the tender mercies of our Saviour and Redeemer:—thus shall we

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be enabled to pass through life with inward peace and tranquility: thus shall we every day become fitter for the last hour, expecting it without terror, and meeting it with courage and resolution; thus, and thus only, shall we be enabled to die the death of the righteous, and our latter end shall be like his.

ON THE
NEW YEAR.

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N I W Y E A R



S E R M O N XXIII.

E Z E K I E L XVIII. 31.

*Cast away from you all your transgressions,
and make you a new heart, and a new
spirit.*

IT hath long since been observed by SERM.
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one of our best writers, that “men
are always praying for and desiring long
life, and yet absurdly, at the same time,
wishing away the particular parts of it;”
imploring the Almighty to extend their
days, and yet lamenting the weight and
tediousness of those which are already
given them. The time past, and the
time to come, engross all our thoughts
and affections, and the only time which

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we can make use of, the time present, is utterly neglected by us: in the mean while, those hours which we pass over unobserved and unimproved, seem as it were to resent our contempt of them: steal away insensibly from us, and only by their loss convince us of their value.

The hour indeed is so like unto the hour, the day unto the day, and the year unto the year, that we are betrayed by the resemblance to each other, and almost mistake them for the same.

But though the inactive and unthinking part of mankind are borne thus down the stream of time without life or motion, the mind which is more awake, the understanding which is more enlightened, will rouse itself from this destructive lethargy, from a serious reflection on the shortness of human life, will be animated

mated and encouraged in search of those duties that are required, and those virtues which are to be practised in it, will mark the days as they roll on, though ever so swiftly, will observe the hours as they glide by, and endeavour to draw such instruction from the years that are past, as may serve to regulate and improve it in those which are to come.

This day, my brethren, completes our little annual circle, and to-morrow brings with it a new year. On this occasion almost every man tacitly flatters himself with the hopes of some additional happiness: the rich promises to himself more riches, the ambitious man anticipates his growth of power, and the libertine extends in thought his range of sensual gratifications. This year, says the disappointed man, shall recompense all my losses; this year, says the wretched, shall

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shall redress all my woes : but who is it that says to himself, this year I will be an honest and more conscientious man, a more sincere friend, and a more pious Christian : this year I will cast away from me all my transgressions, and make me a new heart, and a new spirit.

We think every year of growing greater, richer, happier ; every thing, in short, but better than we are at present. Every man dreams of added pleasure, but every man doth not consider the true method of obtaining it. We propose being more happy, but forget that if we expect it, we should be more virtuous also ; and that if we hope for greater blessings from the Almighty, we should above all things study to deserve them.

To this end therefore, and on this occasion, it may not be improper to consider

der human life only as a longer, and that a very little longer year; and try if we cannot, from the visible analogy and resemblance between them, draw forth some useful and profitable instruction.

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Permit me then to lead you through the short seasons of his transitory being; to point out to you the beauties and defects of each; and, as we pass along, to gather from every one of them such moral conclusions as may be serviceable to us in our future conduct.

And first, then, let us cast our eyes towards the spring of life, that sweet and delightful season; that season which, when present, we all taste with rapture, and when past look back upon with regret: when the mind, like the face of nature, is covered with smiles; when every faculty is awake, every object beautiful,

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tiful, and every enjoyment new; when pleasure is not interrupted by fear, nor pain anticipated by reflection; when dangers are never seen before they oppress, nor evils lamented before they are felt.

At this season the buds of our understanding begin to shoot forth, and the blossoms of knowledge to appear: the prospect opens gradually on the mind, without fatiguing it; and whilst the novelty amuses, the acquisition instructs us.

The passions are indulged without guilt, and subdued without reluctance: there are no cares to disquiet the spirit, no remorse to corrode the heart: it is, in short, one pleasing and uninterrupted scene of joy, peace, innocence, and serenity.

Such

Such is the lovely and delightful portion of our earlier years: the first path of life which we tread in seems as it were strewn with flowers and enriched with perfumes on every side: but alas! as we advance in it, briars and thorns interrupt, labyrinths perplex, rocks and precipices affright us, and few, very few, arrive with any tolerable degree of pleasure or satisfaction at the end of their journey.

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For, pass but a few rolling years, and behold, to the Spring of infancy succeeds the hot Summer of youth, that dangerous, delusive, and important period, which is appointed by our Almighty Creator to determine the colour of our future life, all the joy or sorrow, the happiness and misery, which are to come. At this season the great and arduous task is to be performed: the spirit is to be informed,

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informed, the heart is to be instructed; and if at this time they could be always formed, and always instructed aright, we need not then have so many grating hours of reflection and repentance; we need not wish for a new heart, and a new spirit within us.

But the light of youth is too dazzling for our eyes, the sweets are too inviting to our appetite: at this season the headstrong and tumultuous passions rush in upon, and overwhelm us, temptations on every side allure, examples on every side encourage; hope flatters us in the pursuit of folly, and health invigorates us in the practice of it. When our minds are most susceptible of pleasure, we are least aware of the consequences of it; and when reason and religion, those best of guides, could be of most service, they are generally absent from us; and both the heart
and

and spirit are so enflamed and corrupted, SERM.
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that we have no desire, no power, to
cast away our transgressions, or to make us
a new heart and a new spirit.

Pass we on then to that calmer, softer season, the Autumn of human life: that season when, if ever, we may hope for peace and tranquility; when the fruits of knowledge are arrived at their long wished-for maturity, and the seeds of industry, if any have been sown, shoot forth into a plenteous harvest. The sea is now smooth and unruffled before us, the waves of fortune begin to subside, the storms of lust and ambition are almost blown over, the affections of the soul, like the limbs of the body, are settled into strength and firmness: the voice of reason calls out loudly unto us, the hand of judgment is ready to guide and direct us.

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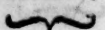
But if, with all these advantages of experience and maturity, we still suffer the follies of youth to enslave, and the influence of example to corrupt us; if to lust and ambition succeed avarice and revenge; if we only dethrone one tyrant to set up another, what have we to be proud of? or how shall we call ourselves the sons of liberty, when all the freedom we can boast is but that we have changed our master?

If at this season we permit the old leaven of vice to remain; if we do not make us a new heart and a new spirit, the greater doubtless will be our reproach, and the heavier our condemnation. Our errors have now no longer the sanction of youth to alleviate, or the plea of inexperience to excuse them: we cannot say wrong without knowing that we say it; we cannot do wrong without knowing that

that we do it : what before was but idle
now becometh wicked, and what was ve-
nial becomes unpardonable.

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Shall we proceed to the last gloomy and uncomfortable season, the Winter of human life, or shall we throw a veil over the melancholy scene? Here indeed the year of nature, and the year of man but too visibly resemble each other. The verdure is gone, and the sun-shine is departed from us. The fruit is withered, and the flowers are decayed : the chearful face of things which we once contemplated with pleasure is obscured, and that which once delighted us, with the representation of all that was fair and beautiful, is deformed by storm and tempest, and rendered an image of barrenness and horror.

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Dreadful indeed is the condition of those amongst us who have deferred till this late hour the necessary work of repentance, who are grown old in sin, and have filled up the measure of their iniquity. As well might we expect in the winter of nature to see the earth cloath itself in fresh verdure, and the trees to be white with blossoms, as in the winter of man to see the mind assuming new habits, or putting on the robes of innocence after it hath been long cloathed in sin, and worn iniquity as a garment: it is not to be expected at this season that the soul can recover her health and strength, or that a new heart and new spirit can be established within us.

In this dark and distressful period of our existence nothing can administer comfort or satisfaction but a conscience void
of

of offence towards God and towards man. Even in the depth of winter the sky, we know, doth not always lour, nor the storm always blow. There is now and then a refreshing dew to fertilize the earth, and a ray of the sun to brighten the horizon. And so it is with the winter of man; if he hath, like a skilful husbandman, layed in a store of useful knowledge; if integrity hath gained him friends; if virtue hath sanctified his name, and innocence secured his peace, age will not sour his disposition, nor decay oppress his heart: though he cannot flatter himself with the prospect of another spring in this life, yet he will look forward to it in a better and more durable one; in a place where there will be no winters to chill, no storms to affright him; where one perpetual and unfading spring for ever flourishes, where a new heart and a new spirit await to

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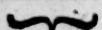
~ crown him with lasting glory, and reward him with eternal happiness.

Briefly then to apply what hath been said, and bring it home to our ^{own hearts} breasts: let not the year of nature pass unobserved by us, but let the whole convey one useful and important lesson; and as we pass through the various seasons, let every one of them teach us to avoid the dangers incident to, and to practise the virtues that are required in them.

If ever there was a time when a new heart and a new spirit were more immediately necessary, it is at present: it is in this venal, vicious, and degenerate age, when even infancy is corrupted by early and unseasonable vice, when youth is blasted and destroyed by folly, fashion, and debauchery; when manhood and maturity are disgraced by follies which
heedless

heedless youth would be ashamed of, and old age drains the cup of intemperance to the last dregs : at a time when, amidst dangers, distress, and calamities abroad, murmurings, discontent, and divisions at home ; when, amidst all this, new pleasures are perpetually rising up to allure, new temptations are perpetually thrown in to corrupt us, and we meet with scarce any thing but universal profligacy, and universal dissipation ; when *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint*, nothing, in short, but an universal reformation of manners, nothing but *a new heart and a new spirit*, can save us from inevitable destruction.

Let us then, I beseech you, my brethren, lay these things seriously to heart. Let us from this moment *cast away from us all our transgressions*, whereby we have transgressed, *and make us a new heart and*

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a new spirit. From this day let us count our reformation, from this æra let us date our virtue: let the new year bring along with it new passions, new desires, new hopes, the passion of piety, the desire of God, and the hope of eternity: let us intreat the gracious Author of our being to send down his divine grace to *make a new heart and a new spirit* within us; such a heart, and such a spirit, as alone can recommend us to his almighty favour and protection. So shall we, from this day forth, instead of indolence and luxury, meet with industry, temperance, and sobriety: so shall every man, by his private virtues, ensure and promote public good, and public happiness: so shall we exchange murmurings and discontent for loyalty and affection, neglect for duty, and rebellion for obedience; war, danger, and discord, for peace, safety, and unanimity.

ON

NUMBERING OUR DAYS.

MEMBER OF THE DAY

S E R M O N XXIV.

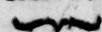
P S A L M. XC. 12.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may
apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

THERE is not any thing which morality can inculcate, or religion enjoin, that will more easily persuade men to a consideration of their latter end, and a necessary preparation for it, than the serious contemplation on the shortness and vanity of human life. This is an argument which requires no depth of wisdom to conceive, no superior faculties to discuss, but appeals to the senses, and speaks to the hearts of all men ; and yet

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yet the senses of all men deceive, the hearts of all men betray them, and those things which should be for their learning, are unto them an occasion of falling. The certainty of death is perhaps among those truths, which, merely because they are obvious, we do not think sufficiently worthy of our attention; it is almost the only thing we know, and we treat it as if it were the only thing we were ignorant of. In the midst of life we are in death; but, like hardy and fearless soldiers, though we are in the heat of the battle, though thousands fall beside us, and ten thousand on our right hand, yet, whilst we have society to animate, whilst we have hope to encourage, and all the noise and bustle of the war to divert our thoughts, we are strangers to fear, and insensible of our danger. The goodness of the Almighty is alike visible in what it shews, and in what it conceals from

us :

us: God, of his mercy, has thought fit to hide from our knowledge the fatal hour of our dissolution, because, were the prospect of death continually before our eyes, the affairs of this world could never be carried on with that chearfulness and alacrity which are so highly requisite to the performance of them. It would damp all the faculties, and put a stop to all the efforts and designs of the human mind, and leave a gloom and horror upon it, too great for reason and reflection to remove: in short, were the sword perpetually hanging over our heads, the feast of life would afford us but little comfort in the enjoyment of it.

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An eminent heathen writer, in an elegant discourse on the idle pursuits and enjoyments of men in this uncertain state, among many other sensible reflections, put into the mouth of one of his imaginary

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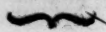
nary deities, thus ridicules the folly
of mankind. "Look, says he, on that
"builder there, and think, what would
"he not rather do, though he now so
"industriously presses on the labourer to
"finish his costly mansion, did he know
"it should be no sooner built but that
"he must die, and leave the possession of
"it to his heir, ere he, poor wretch,
"shall have had even once the pleasure
"of supping in it. Or look on him
"who hugs himself on his becoming a
"father, entertains his friends at a feast
"of joy, and calls the boy by his own
"name. If he knew this darling child
"should never outlive his seventh year,
"would he, think you, be so wanton
"at his birth? But he fondly imagines
"himself happy in a child who shall
"hereafter be crowned in the olympic
"games, and observes not, at the same
"time,

“time, his afflicted neighbour carrying
“out his son to the last fire.”

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Thus could an unenlightened heathen laugh at, and expose the folly and vanity of mankind, and deservedly reproach them for not considering their latter end. If their behaviour, in a point so important, was a proper subject of ridicule, what shall we say to those to whom life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel of Christ? We, who have such threats to alarm, and such hopes to encourage us, ought to be wiser, to understand better to number our few days, and seriously to consider and prepare for our latter end.

But that the weight and importance of the precept in my text may appear the more plainly, it may not be amiss to consider and enforce it in the various stages
of

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of this our short journey, that men may be convinced how necessary it is to number their days, and apply their hearts unto wisdom. To those therefore who are in the Spring of life, I would first address myself; those who are yet untainted by false principles, and uncorrupted by bad example. Let us send up our offerings to the Almighty, whilst we have something worthy of his acceptance: our loyalty to our Sovereign will then be most meritorious, when the enemy is using every method to alienate our affections from him; let us not make a merit of resigning what we can no longer maintain, but when the passions are most importunate, and the appetites most unruly, yield them up to the guidance of reason and religion; *with such sacrifices God is well pleased.* To whom should we dedicate the temple, but to him that raised it? or who is more worthy of the first-fruits,

fruits, than he who gave us the whole harvest? If in the days of our youth we remember our Creator, we may rest assured he will not forget us in our more advanced years; if we give the earlier part of life to religion, habit will strengthen reason, and self-love side with virtue. When the mind has long employed itself on any particular study, it contracts a fondness and partiality not easily removed; besides that the elder biases of the soul, either towards good or evil, will ever claim the privilege of its birth-right, and assume an authority over the future conduct of our lives. With how much care and caution therefore are the first tendencies of youth to be observed. How much may their happiness, both here and hereafter, depend upon them?

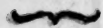
It has of late years been too often observed, that the foolish vanity of parents
hath

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hath conspired with the natural forwardness of their children to ruin and destroy them, by pushing them too early into the business and pleasures of a licentious age. Our youth have found out methods to antedate old age, and hasten the footsteps of death ; to crowd their vices into as short a space as possible, and fill up as soon as they can the measure of their iniquity. They scorn to owe their infirmities to grey hairs, or their decay to nature ; but without ever numbering their few days, are quickly worn down by vice and debauchery, and hurry themselves out of the world at an age when their forefathers were scarce entered into it.

Pass we on then from the slippery and dangerous path of youth, to the middle state of manhood. Here our feet tread firmer, and our labour grows more easy : judgment steps into our assistance, the
voice

voice of reason is clearer and more distinct, the violent and tumultuous passions begin to subside; but because the waves are less disturbed, and the storm a little blown over, we must not therefore fancy ourselves in the haven; we are as loth to consider our latter end, and to think on the one thing needful, at this time, as at any period of our lives. In infancy and in youth every toy can please, and every novelty delight; and as we advance in years we do not lay aside, but change the bauble; our amusements are still as idle as before, and only not so innocent. When we are talking to *men*, to put them in mind that they *were* men, would, one should think, be a sufficient reproof: it is then high time to put away childish things, and apply our hearts unto wisdom; to reflect that the hour is come when there is no dallying with life, when youth can no longer excuse our errors,

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nor inexperience palliate our crimes, and every sin is aggravated and inflamed by our own knowledge and consciousness of it. And yet I know not how it is, but in this stage of life we are still liable to the temptations of pleasure, and all those vices which are strengthened and improved by habit; besides that the common business and affairs of life call away our attention, and will not let our affections there be fixed where only true joys are to be found: we apply our hearts in short too much to the wisdom of this world, to reflect as we ought on the important concerns of the other.

Come we then to the last and closing scene; when the hot summer of life is over, we enjoy a sickly and short autumn, and quickly drop into the winter of our days. And here we cannot help observing that vice, which in youth is pitiable,

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which in manhood is indecent, becomes
in age most shameful and most detestable. SERM.
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One would think the approach of death, the decay of nature, and the infirmities always attendant on this period, might teach men at least to reflect and to repent; that when the glass runs low, we should watch every grain of sand as it flows out. But those who have least health and strength, are often more careless of it; and men of experience in the world will tell us, none are so prodigal as bankrupts; as thought and reflection become more necessary, they grow also more distasteful; when our little store of days is almost exhausted, we are afraid to look into the account, lest we should discover our poverty, and, like sick men, would shun the mirror which too faithfully points out their decay, and makes them startle at their own deformity.

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If such there be, and such there doubtless are amongst us, dangerous indeed is their condition. Where the disease of vice has grown to such a malignancy, and become habitual to the constitution, common medicines have not the power to act; the usual remedies are applied in vain. The grace of God indeed may intervene, may save our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling into everlasting destruction. If we can once strike out of the paths of vice, and turn into the road of virtue, a willing mind will carry us a great way on in a very little time, and it is never too late to begin to be happy. In youth, therefore, in manhood, and in age, in every short portion of this uncertain state, let us now and then reflect on our condition, *let us number our days, and apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Short as our lives are, and uncertain as their end, yet are we none of us without warning given.

For

For what, I beseech you, are the calamities, what are the diseases and the deaths of our friends, but angels sent to us from the Almighty, on a message of love and tenderness sent, for our warning and for our instruction. What, indeed, are all those friendly admonitions of our approaching dissolution which God gives us, but the strongest proofs of his unbounded and unspeakable mercy towards us! to wean our affections from things below, by rendering life day by day less desirable. Every year steals away something from us: in one we lose a relation, in the next a friend; health grows more precarious, and pleasure less alluring, till by degrees the whole little mass of happiness we had been gathering drops from us insensibly; and that grave which we had once looked on with so much horror, becomes at last our refuge and our shelter. Surely, then, to change these kind ad-

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monitions, these paternal chastisements designed to restrain our follies, and engage us in the practice of virtue, into incentives of vice, and allurements to sin and wickedness, is a mark of the greatest depravity which human nature is capable of falling into. There are men who reverse the excellent precept of my text, who number their days, that they may apply their hearts not unto wisdom, but unto folly; *let us eat and drink, say they, for to-morrow we die. Come, let us enjoy the good things that are present, being extinguished, our bodies shall be turned into ashes, and our spirit shall vanish as the soft air. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine, and let no flower of the Spring pass by us; let us crown ourselves with rose-buds before they be withered.* Thus the terrors of death, and the dark prospect of the grave, instead of exciting us to a serious preparation for them, only serve as foils to set off the charms

charms of pleasure, which are already
but too engaging.

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But what unmanly, what low and irrational pleasure will not men stoop to, the better to shake off the insufferable load of time! How industrious have we grown of late in filling up every vacuity, lest a moment's thought or reflection should drop into our cup of folly, and embitter the whole draught! Whence arises the plentiful field of diversions, the gaudy shifting scene of entertainments, which the fashionable world is every day employed in? It is not that we are richer, happier, or wiser than our ancestors: no, it is the direct contrary; it is because we are poorer, sillier, and more miserable. Our large stock is reduced to a morsel, and penury has made us careless of it; we are poor, and to forget our poverty, we lavish away the small remainder. Vi-

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cious, and that we may not reflect that we are so, we plunge deeper into vice; we are, in short, as extravagant as if we were rich, and just as gay as if we were innocent. In this manner we go on, forgetful of the great business and design for which we were created, in a continual round of fatal and destructive pleasures. Though life is every day changing, the change is unperceived; though we are every hour approaching nearer to the grave, yet the descent is so gradual, the decay so imperceptible, that we scarce know we are going down hill, till we are almost at the bottom: till age and infirmity, those unwelcome messengers, come to inform us of a disagreeable truth we are very loth to give credit to; whilst instead of pursuing our journey, like thoughtful travellers, we turn aside into every by-path that invites us, and let our eyes wander after every object that can
amuse

amuse them ; the day closes in ; night comes upon us on a sudden, and we are quickly swallowed up in darkness and the shadow of death. When the estate indeed is almost spent, then nothing appears so amiable as frugality ; when we are just upon the point of losing our treasure, we begin to know the value of it ; we repent too late, and then would fain step back, as it were, to do that great business which we had all our lives neglected. O that men would therefore be wise ! that they would consider their latter end ! Delay is a subtle and dangerous thief, which cheats us both of present and future happiness. Let us, then, redeem the time ; not idly throw away our youth, our health, and our spirits on idle amusements, and leave the vast concerns of eternity to the mercies of a moment. Let us consider, that though God hath promised pardon to our repentance,

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he hath not also promised life till we repent. We have much to do, and but little, very little time to do it in. Let us count over our small stock, and husband it with the utmost caution, ever remembering that idle hours, as well as idle words, must one day be accounted for; and that heaven is not reserved for the slothful and indolent, but for those only who work out their own salvation. Let us not flatter ourselves that, because the debt of nature is not yet required of us, we are therefore entirely discharged of it: though we cannot tell the time, the time will infallibly come; *but of that day and hour knoweth no man.*

What remains, then, but that we bid adieu to our sins, that we *break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us*; now that we have time, now that we have health, vigour and activity, *before those*

those days come when we shall say, we have no pleasure in them. Let us employ our time, then, in the service of God, and of our fellow-creatures, that at the last and great day, those fellow-creatures may intreat for us, and that God reward us. Let us spend our youth in the search of truth, and our riper years in the practice of it. To conclude, let us also number our days in this world, that they may be crowned with glory and happiness in that which is to come.

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ON

A S S I D U I T Y.

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A S S I D U I T Y

S E R M O N XXV.

ECCLES. IX. 10.

*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it
with thy might; for there is no work,
nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,
in the grave whither thou goest.*

SOLOMON, the supposed author,
of the book of Ecclesiastes, whose
active genius and disposition were per-
petually urging him on in the pursuit of
knowledge, who had gotten more wis-
dom than all those that went before him;
having found by long experience that
nothing truly valuable could ever be ac-
quired without pain, perseverance and as-
siduity; recommends in the words of my
text,

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text, that industry which he had himself so successfully practised, and that constant exertion of the human powers and faculties, for which he had been himself so eminently distinguished.

That this his salutary advice might carry with it the greater weight and authority, he enforces it with an argument that appeals to the senses of all men, and which must strike with equal force on every heart that is open to conviction. *Whatsoever, says he, thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest*

If we are listless and indolent in the pursuit of riches, fame, or power, if we give but half our strength and application, we shall ever fall short of the end proposed. And as it is with what are generally
called

called the good things of this life, that which more immediately concerns our interest and advantage here, so is it also with those nobler accomplishments of the mind, which distinguish man from the inferior parts of the creation. The paths of human learning are thorny and perplexing at our first entrance into them; and though by degrees they grow wider and more passable, yet unless we pursue them with all our might, we shall never attain to any pre-eminence or perfection in them. Half-wise men disgrace wisdom, half-learned men dishonour learning, half-good and religious men, do hurt to that virtue, and prejudice that holy faith which they profess.

Thus useful, and thus necessary, are industry and perseverance to support our character, and render us easy and happy in our several stations and professions;

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but the argument will rise upon us with redoubled force, when we come to consider what Solomon hath added on this occasion to recommend and establish it: that *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither we are going.* To a heathen, or to an infidel, to one who had no hopes or fears of a future state, the argument which the wise man here makes use of would indeed have very little power: if there were no life after this, what reason would persuade men to perpetual labour, and unremitted activity in search of objects that could be of very little use or service to them? why should they exercise themselves in works that had no prospect of reward? whilst, on the other hand, to the Christian believer, to him who looks for the resurrection of the dead, nothing can so animate and inspirit him in every good word and work, as the admonition of the preacher,

preacher, who tells him, that *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither he is going*. Most indisputable it must be to every rational and thinking man, that this life is a state of probation; that God has endowed us all with talents and abilities sufficient for the attainment of that knowledge which he has commanded us to search after, and that wisdom which he has enjoined us to pursue: he hath given us faculties which we ought to exert, and powers which we are bound to employ. We are not sent into this world to be idle spectators in the great theatre, but every one of us to act the part allotted to him; to be active and vigilant in the practice of those duties which religion commands us to practise, and to make all our views and interests in this life subservient to the more important concerns of the other. For the performance of

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these offices, God hath decreed unto man his appointed time, beyond which no human art can possibly extend it; reserving to himself the power of shortening those limits, in whatever degree his divine wisdom should think most proper. The Almighty Being, of his infinite goodness and mercy, hath concealed from us the fatal hour of our dissolution, that seeing the uncertainty of our state and condition here, we might always be ready and prepared for it, that not knowing when the bridegroom cometh, we might have our lamps always ready trimmed to receive him.

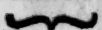
And yet were we to judge from the supineness, indolence, and inactivity that is so universally prevalent amongst us, we should imagine that the life of man extended to many centuries; that no sickness or misfortune could interrupt, no accidents

accidents intervene to prevent the execution of every thing which he proposed, and that whatever his hand found to do, he would do it with all his might. But how different from this is the real state of human nature! the days of man are but threescore years and ten, and though men come to fourscore years, yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow; so soon passeth it away, and we are gone.

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The great business of man therefore, in this life, is doubtless to prepare himself for a better: to search after that knowledge and wisdom here below, which may fit them for the participation of that infinitely superior wisdom and knowledge which are above. Those, and those only, whose diligence and faithfulness have been distinguished on earth, can hope to be rewarded in heaven. The higher degree of moral perfection which we attain

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unto, the purer habit and taste which we contract for refined and spiritual enjoyments, the greater pleasure shall we undoubtedly enjoy in the society of blessed spirits, the exalted converse with the sons of God. But unless we apply ourselves early to the study of divine truths, unless we exert all our powers, and do it with all our might ; unless our conduct is steady, regular, and uniform, unless we pursue one great and noble end with unchangeable resolution and perseverance, we have no title to the name of rational beings, much less to that of good and pious Christians.

Time, therefore, that pearl of great price, whose real value we are so little acquainted with, should be considered by us, not as an inheritance from our forefathers which we have a right to squander away as may be most convenient or agreeable

able to us, but as a treasure lent unto us, deposited in our hands by the great Lord and Master of all things, whose stewards we are, and who will undoubtedly call us to account for the minutest portion of it: we cannot mispend or misapply one hour or even one minute without wronging, and consequently without offending, our divine Benefactor. *Whatsoever, therefore, thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.* After our short day of life is over, there is no morrow for us: we should work therefore whilst it is day, before the night cometh wherein no man can work, it will be too late for thee, O man, when thy feet are stumbling upon the high mountains, and the shadows of the evening have overtaken thee.

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There is no wish more common, tho' at the same time none more vain or absurd, than that which is so frequently formed by those who have trod with observation the paths of human life, the wish that they might be permitted to live over again their past days.

If the best author that ever wrote were carefully and dispassionately to revise his works after a deliberate and impartial criticism, he would see in them a thousand errors which had escaped his notice, a thousand errors and imperfections which he had never thought on; how happy would he esteem himself, were it possible that he could write it all over again!—And in like manner, If the best man who ever lived was to look back on the volume of his past life, how many pages would he find in it
blotted

blotted with sin and corruption, how many full of idle and trifling occurrences, how many leaves totally blank: How ashamed would he be of such a work to be read over and considered by such a judge, by an impartial and all-knowing God! how would he wish, if it were possible, to live it over again! But this is a privilege which it would be as unreasonable in him to request, as it is impossible for him to enjoy. As man, therefore, hath but one volume to write, which is to determine his merit, but one task to perform, which is to decide his fate, to make him happy or miserable for ever; to the execution of that let him zealously and steadily apply; and rest assured, that if he hath exerted his utmost abilities, if he hath done it with all his might, he will be rewarded for it, not according to the intrinsic value of the perform-

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performance, but in proportion to his care, zeal, and alacrity in the execution of it.

What then, upon the whole, is the lesson of instruction to be learned from the royal monitor's advice, as expressed in the words of my text ?

That we should be active, vigilant, and industrious in our several stations and professions ; that when we set about any work or device which our hand findeth to do, we should not slightly and carelessly perform it, but bestow on it those pains and that attention which alone can render it perfect and complete ; that, above all, in pursuit of the one thing needful, that wisdom and knowledge on which our eternal happiness depends, we should be awake, zealous, and indefatigable, constantly keeping in view the
great

great end of our being: that we should frequently reflect within ourselves on the shortness and vanity of human life, observe the years as they roll, and the hours as they pass along, remembering that every hour brings us nearer to that period which must put an end to all our labours, which must at once stamp our character, and seal our fate, that important crisis, which must recommend us to the divine favour, or consign us to everlasting punishment. Let these considerations, my brethren, sink deep into our hearts: they may be useful to us in every rank and condition, in every age and period of human life.

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It will become the rich and great to reflect that the more is given the more will be required; that the greater and more frequent opportunities they have of doing good, the more indispensable

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fible is their obligation to perform it; that the more time and leisure they are masters of, the greater care and assiduity will be expected from them in the proper employment of it; that as they have superior advantages to assist them in the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, their want or neglect, their abuse or misapplication of them, will be the more inexcusable; that neither their talents or abilities, any more than their riches, can follow them to the grave; and if they have not used them profitably in this world, they can only rise up in judgment and bear witness against them in that which is to come.

To the poor, on the other hand, it may be a consolation to reflect, that if they are sober, diligent, and industrious in their calling and profession, if they do whatever their hand findeth to do
with

with all their might, God, who is no respecter of persons, will reward them not according to the splendor and dignity of their office, but to the manner in which it is performed: that as there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, neither is there at the same time any rank or distinction in the grave whither they are going: that they are approaching to a place where there is no pre eminence but that of goodness, no superiority but that of virtue: that no knowledge or wisdom will find acceptance with God, but that which they were as capable of attaining as the rich and great, the wisdom from above, and the knowledge unto salvation.

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But further, and to conclude: as the words before us may afford ample matter of consideration to all ranks and degrees,

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so likewise may they convey instruction to every age and period of human life.

Let those who are in the bloom and vigour of youth learn from hence, not to suffer their faculties to languish and decay from sloth and inactivity, but to exert them whilst in the zenith and meridian of their power. Let them remember, that it is not the length of life, but the use which we make of it, that will entitle us to a reward from the Ancient of Days : that wisdom is grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age ; that if, at this dangerous but important period, when the unthinking and voluptuous indulge in sensual pleasures, they employ their hours in the culture of their minds, and the improvement of their understanding ; if they search after wisdom and knowledge, old age as it advances,

vances, instead of being attended by remorse and repentance, will bring along with it the pleasing remembrance of their past conduct, and a delightful prospect of future felicity.

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Let those who are arrived at maturer years, when they reflect on the advice given in my text, consider, (if they have not already considered) that the levity and carelessness of youth would ill become them in a more advanced age; that they should do every thing with all their might and power, because that might and power cannot last long; and that therefore it is incumbent on them strenuously to exert it; and that this is the only opportunity of acquiring those perfections which alone can impart present satisfaction, or ensure future happiness.

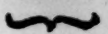
Lastly, let those whom God hath graciously blest with length of days, learn
with

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with humble gratitude to adore the divine Author of them. What their weak and impotent hand findeth to do, let them do with all their might, with all the little remains of power and strength that are still left them. If they have hitherto been listless, negligent, and slothful, let them endeavour to make amends for past indolence by extraordinary industry and application: that so, though they come into the vineyard but at the eleventh hour they may by unwearied diligence and assiduity merit the same reward as the labourers of the first, who have borne the heat and burthen of the day. Let them reflect, that the time is near at hand when every avenue to wisdom and knowledge must be closed up, and but a few hours are left for light and instruction; these therefore let them husband with the utmost caution, and give up their whole time and attention to

to the one thing needful; so may God in his tender mercy accept their imperfect sacrifice, forgive their past errors, pass over their numerous transgressions, instruct them with his own divine knowledge, enlighten them with his own wisdom, and finally reward them with everlasting happiness.

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to the end being needed to the God
in his heart mercy and their hope
to be factored, forgive their past
and give them new resolutions
in their heart with his own divine
light, and then with his own
don't let them be tempted from this
faith.

ON
EVIL-SPEAKING.

N 2

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J A M E S IV. II.

Speak not evil one of another.

IT is an invariable truth, and as SERM.
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such hath been universally acknowledged, that those things which have power to be most serviceable, have also the power of being most pernicious; a truth never perhaps more apparent, than in that illustrious privilege which so eminently distinguisheth man from the inferior part of the creation, the privilege of communicating our sentiments to each other, by that amazing faculty of speech which God hath graciously be-

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stowed upon us. To make it serve meaner and for other purposes than those for which it was originally designed, will doubtless subject its ungrateful possessor to the divine displeasure. It were better, as an eminent writer observes, to have been born destitute of speech or reason, than to make use of those noble gifts of Providence to each others destruction. *The tongue, says the Apostle St. James, is a world of wickedness; it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature: therewith bless we God the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.* St. James, we may observe, reproaches men for their folly and ingratitude, and deems them, what they most certainly are, both impious and absurd, to adore their Maker one moment, and in the next abuse and vilify his creatures; to pretend respect and honour for the original, and at the same time

time shew so much hatred and contempt for the copy and resemblance of him.

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These things, says the apostle, *ought not to be*; they ought not, and yet they are, and perhaps ever will be so: whilst there are men in the world, there will be calumniators; and whilst virtue and merit subsist, there will be tongues to defame and lessen them.

Passions for the most part, like habits, modes, and customs, shift and vary with a variable world, but evil-speaking is a vice that will be always in fashion. Some diseases affect some bodies and ages only; some plants and trees thrive but in that soil which is peculiar to their natures; but this disease affects every constitution, this weed sprouts up in every clime, and flourishes in every soil. It is indeed a vice which all men readily and universally condemn, and yet which almost all men do as readily and as universally practise:

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practise : a crime, in short, which deserves the heartiest censure from all the lovers of truth, and the warmest resentment from all the friends of virtue, as it is destructive of the precepts, and absolutely in opposition to the practice of our holy religion, and the divine author of it ; who came down to bring peace upon earth, and good-will towards men, that peace which the evil-speaker destroys, and that good-will which he is a stranger to, and which as he is himself incapable of feeling, he is perpetually endeavouring to banish from the breasts of others.

Such is the hard lot of mankind, that the most valuable of our possessions is the most easily snatched from us, and with the greatest difficulty recovered : that beauty which sickness impairs, health may restore ; and those riches which fortune deprives us of, she often repays with interest ; whilst our reputation, if once lost,

lost, either by our own folly, or through the malice and wickedness of others, is scarce ever to be regained. A good name, as the wise man sayeth, is like precious ointment, and one dead fly in it spoileth the whole box. The poison of slander seldom finds an antidote, and the wounds of honour never close. Loss of character is ever attended with this peculiar misfortune, that it is not always even in the power of him who stole, to restore it: the calumny may wander where the recantation cannot: the sound may be gone forth into all parts, and the report unto the ends of the world: the arrow of the slanderer cannot be recalled, and falsehood may travel too fast, for truth ever to overtake her.

When we consider how much the welfare and prosperity of men depends on their good name; however little virtue

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tue in this degenerate age is either loved or rewarded ; yet notwithstanding, even the semblance of it is treated with honour and respect : when we consider, at the same time, how many there are amongst us whose integrity perhaps is all their wealth, whose credit and character is all their guard and support, we cannot wonder all should be so tenacious of that which all are so nearly concerned in, and which it is so much their interest to preserve.

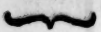
It is not to be imagined that men would ever tamely suffer their lives and properties to be endangered, and the well-being of society undermined, without the strongest resentment. Self-preservation therefore long since taught them, by salutary laws, to guard against the impiety of those who by false testimony should endeavour to defraud and injure their

their neighbour; and accordingly we find in all ages and nations, that species of evil-speaking which adds impiety to falsehood, and rises to the heinous guilt of perjury, hath ever been subjected to its deserved punishment by the laws of the community. But as this is a branch of the vice under our consideration, which few, it is to be hoped, are abandoned enough to practise, I shall not at present dwell upon it, but proceed to the other species of it, perhaps equally destructive of the peace and happiness of mankind, though for reasons sufficiently obvious, they do not fall within the reach of human judicature.

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And amongst these cruel destroyers of every thing that is good and virtuous, slander stands foremost in the list: a bold and daring adversary, that attacks all without mercy and without distinction,
and

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and depends (not without too good foundation) on a credulous and idle world for that belief and support which it so often meets with. When indeed we call to mind how greedily every idle tale is devoured, and with how much pleasure those are heard who propagate false reports, we cannot so much wonder at the number of voluntary labourers in the service of calumny; credit of this kind is easily gained amongst the weak and inconsiderate, the foolish, and the vicious which form perhaps the greatest part of mankind.

Still more frequent and more fatal is the malignancy of this evil when the coward lies concealed, and cannot be called upon to support his assertions; the pestilence that walketh in darkness is more to be feared than the arrow which flieth at noon-day.

There

There is not a truer observation than that those only are capable of praising virtue who do themselves practise it; whilst, on the other hand, the lowest and most abandoned of men can censure the faults, and deride the weaknesses of the most exalted beings. How often do the best and noblest characters fall a sacrifice to the lowest and most contemptible! how often hath a worthless and insignificant creature, without one good quality to recommend him, by artful insinuations and malicious falsehood, ruined the peace and undermined the happiness of a whole innocent and virtuous family! Those who have no merit of their own, always take an ill-natured pleasure in misrepresenting and degrading the merit of others: like low and indigent gamesters, who have nothing to lose themselves, and can therefore with less hazard combine

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to ruin and destroy the fortunes of the rich and wealthy.

How many are there amongst us whose whole joy and whose whole business it is, to blacken and asperse the characters even of their best friends and benefactors ! how many are there, who because their own passions are benumbed by insensibility, deadened by age and infirmities, or perhaps only artfully concealed by hypocrisy, presume on the merit of their fancied pre-eminence, to expose the failings of all whom they are connected with, and to ridicule the follies and imperfections of all whom they have the least knowledge of.

But surely no title can be too opprobrious, no punishment can be too severe, for those worst of assassins, who stab the honour and reputation of their neighbour :

hour : *thou shalt not murder ; thou shalt not steal ; thou shalt not bear false witness,* SERM.
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say the laws of the Almighty. The calumniator breaks through every one of these, and tramples on the commandments of his God. He who flanders, murders, and steals also ; murders the good name, and steals the reputation of his fellow-creature ; and as his guilt is double, so doubtless will be his condemnation.

There is not a stronger mark of the weakness of our nature, than that we are forced to be upon our guard even against the perfections of it : and above all the fatal pre-eminences which some enjoy above others, wit is perhaps the most destructive ; riches are not more apt to make men proud, nor power to beget insolence and oppression, than wit is to betray its possessor into a habit of censure and invective. Vanity is an idol that
delights

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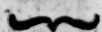
delights in sacrifice, and thinks no offering too precious for its votaries to bestow: friendship, honour, gratitude, all the ties of relation, all the bonds of natural affection, have been broken through and contemned, merely to support the character of a spritely satyrist, or, in more proper terms, of a base reviler, who, for the poor fame of being witty, would make thousands unhappy, and then laugh at them for being so; *who casts arrows, fire-brands, and death, and then says, Was I not in sport?*

But the folly, the meanness, and the impiety of evil-speaking will appear still more evident to us, if we seriously consider in what manner we ought to employ that time and those talents which God hath graciously bestowed upon us. We have the whole range of nature before our eyes, and the wonders of the creation

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to unfold ; languages to enlighten, and history to improve our minds : philosophy is ever ready to make us wise, and religion to secure our happiness. How noble a field hath the human soul to expatiate in, and with what variety may it be entertained ! and yet how often, instead of bettering each other's hearts by innocent and useful converse, do we spend our hours either in listening to the calumnies and misrepresentations of those about us, or by dwelling ourselves on the weakneses and imperfections of our neighbours ! To leave the noble feast of nature and of reason, to feed on such coarse and sordid diet, is surely the mark of an appetite most vicious and most depraved.

“ Raillery on the unfortunate,” says an excellent heathen author, “ is inhumanity ; and that reputation much too

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dear which is purchased at the expence of our integrity." Can any thing indeed be more inhuman, more diabolical, than to owe our pleasure to another's misery, our happiness to his misfortune, our praise to his infamy? And yet this is the constant diversion which we amuse ourselves with, this is the cruel sport we are so fond of.

Let us then, my brethren, put the case home to ourselves, and ask our own hearts whether, and how often, we have been guilty of this mean and destructive vice. Reflect a little, I beseech you, on what you have often yourselves experienced; consider, in the serenity of your morning thoughts, whence arose the mirth, the gaiety, the entertainment of the evening before: was it from the sober, serious discussion of any important point in religion or morality, from the discovery

discovery of any thing that might promote the welfare of society, or the happiness of your fellow-creatures, from the applauses bestowed on neglected virtue, or the resolutions taken to reward it? Did it arise from mutual chearfulness, complacency and good-will one towards another? or, on the other hand, did the guilty joy you tasted spring from the repetition of your neighbour's faults, some cruel jest on his misfortunes, some unmanly triumph over his weakness? Did the laugh arise from the aggravation of another's failings, or the lessening of another's merit? Was the absent injured, or the dead calumniated? If from such mean and ungenerous behaviour flowed all the pleasure you can boast of, it was the joy of fools: and yet it is the joy perhaps of half the companies we are engaged in, the malevolent pleasure of half the world.

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Men may talk largely of the pleasures of society, and mutual intercourse; but surely when they thus meet only to censure and revile, when conversation is thus tainted by slander, calumny and detraction, it is no longer a Christian assembly, but a Roman amphitheatre, where the beasts of old were turned in together to prey upon, and devour one another.

Hear then the royal preacher's advice, and learn humanity. *Admonish thy friend, says Solomon; it may be he hath not done it, or if he hath, that he do it not again: admonish thy friend, it may be he hath not said it, or if he hath, that he speak it not again: admonish thy friend, for many times it is a slander, and believe not every tale.*

Let us then neither spread false reports ourselves, nor give ear to those who spread them; to listen to rumour is a species of calumny.

calumny. He who receives what is unlawfully taken from another, is by human laws considered as equally guilty with him who stole it; and in like manner, he who sends forth, and he who propagates and encourages malicious falsehoods, will in the eyes of God, and should also in the eyes of men, appear equally infamous and detestable. *Speak not evil, therefore, one of another, brethren*; if we are brethren, sons of one great Lord and Father, fellow-creatures and fellow-Christians, let us behave as such. *What man is he, says the Psalmist, that desireth life, and loveth many days? keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.* How indeed can we expect that God will lengthen our days, whilst we employ them in embittering those of others; or that he will extend that mercy to us, which we refuse to our fellow-creatures? *Who art thou, says the apostle, that judgest another?*

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another? We must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us reflect then, that it doth not become the offender to judge, or the guilty to accuse. Let him that is innocent, therefore, and him alone, as our Saviour himself observed, cast the first stone: let us remember what the word of God hath assured us of, that revilers can never enter into heaven, any more than murderers and adulterers; never enter into a place where, as there are none to merit, there can be none to believe their censures; where the virtues of the good shall no longer be sullied by calumny or evil-speaking, his actions no longer liable to be mistaken or misrepresented: where we shall all, without regard to the opinions of men concerning us whilst here on earth, without regard to wealth, titles, rank, or profession, meet with that punishment or that reward, and that only, which we deserve,

deserve. From this low scene, where we are now engaged, this sink of malice, calumny and detraction, to the regions of peace and justice, of righteousness and truth, may the God of mercies convey us all, through the merits and mediation of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

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deliver. From this low level, where we
 are now engaged, this link of justice,
 equity and devotion, to the regions
 of peace and justice, of righteousness
 and truth, may the God of wisdom con-
 vey us all, through the ocean and medi-
 ation of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

MEMORANDUM XXVII

ON

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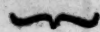
S E R M O N XXVII.

ECCLESIASTES VII. 9.

*Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry, for
anger resteth in the bosom of fools.*

AMONGST all those violent and unruly passions, which disturb the peace and undermine the happiness of mankind, there is not perhaps one which is attended with more fatal and destructive consequences, than that which the wise man in the words of my text so justly branded with the name of folly; a folly of so malignant and dangerous a nature, as to root up and destroy all the pleasures of Society; absolutely opposite and contradictory to the rules of reason, and utterly

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terly inconsistent with the dictates of religion ; a folly, which, whilst it brings terror and destruction on others, reflects the highest shame and ignominy on ourselves ; which urges us on to violate the laws both of God and man, and not only makes us truly unhappy in this world, but at the same time must likewise inevitably subject us to the divine displeasure in that which is to come. The passion of anger, as implanted in the breast of man, by our all wise and good Creator, hath doubtless nothing in it of guilt or misery, though by our own unhappy management of it, it may become productive of both.

Anger is indeed no more than a sudden emotion of the soul alarmed at the approach of evil, and preparing for its own defence. The mind no sooner receives a wound from without, than, like the body,
it

it grows warm and inflamed ; the faculties of the one, like the limbs of the other, seem immediately to place themselves in a posture of resistance, and to resent the injury received : without this natural armour of the mind, we should be in perpetual danger of repeated insults, and fall a helpless sacrifice to the violence of every enemy that attacked us.

Thus far the passion, we see, is neither unlawful or unnecessary ; we may doubtless, as scripture hath itself assured, and reason doth sufficiently confirm to us, *be angry and sin not* : we should sin indeed in some circumstances, that is, we should be deficient in the duty we owe to ourselves if we were not so.

But in this, as in almost every human affection, it is the abuse, and not the thing,

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thing, the excess, and not the passion, which constitutes the crime, and brings on the punishment.

Anger, like that fire which it so nearly resembles, may be a good and useful servant, whilst submissive to the dictates of reason, and obedient to the laws of humanity; but when it acts by its own authority, without restraint or controul, it becomes a most cruel and imperious master. It may be the means, we cannot but acknowledge, of saving us from some dangers; but it may also, as will more evidently appear in the subsequent discourse, lead us into many more: it may sometimes act the part of a friend, guardian, and protector, but it may, like other friends, other guardians and protectors, deceive and betray us, and often prove our most bitter and most inveterate enemy.

Be

Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry, says Solomon, for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

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That is to say, it may sometimes intrude, like an officious visitor, into the breast even of the wise man, but the bosom of the fool is as it were its habitation and its home, its favourite and its constant residence, where it is always sure to meet with a favourable reception and a hearty welcome.

And here it may not be improper to observe, that most men are so fond of being thought wise, that they had rather suffer the imputation of vice, than of folly; and he who reprehends the morals of his neighbour, will meet with a readier forgiveness than he who impeaches his understanding. Certain it is, that, at least in this our age, we had rather be called

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called knaves than fools. Amongst the latter, we see the angry man is ranked by Solomon, by that royal follower of wisdom, whose judgment we have surely no right to dispute, and whose impartiality we have no right to question. If we therefore have any regard to our character and reputation, if we have any ambition to acquire that wisdom which he possessed, or any desire of avoiding that folly which he so severely censures; it will become us to consider what it was that induced him to brand this passion with a name so odious, or to set its votaries in a light so contemptible.—1st, Because the angry man doth by the indulgence of his passion, defeat his own end and purpose in it—2dly, Because it hurts his character and reputation:—and 3dly, Because it wounds his peace and tranquillity. Solomon then might most naturally

and

and probably conclude, that anger rested in the bosom of fools.

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First, then, I shall take occasion to observe, that the angry man must be a fool, because he defeats his own end and purpose.

If to be angry with men for their folly would make them wiser, or if to be angry with them for their wickedness would make them better, we should not want some excuse for our warmth, and some reason for our resentment. The passionate man, though he would then be hurtful to himself, might still be serviceable to others, and a private vice become the means of promoting public virtue ; but the truth is, this salutary effect is by no means to be expected from a remedy so poor and so inefficacious ; a remedy, which, like many others, instead of removing but encreases the disorder.

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Ridicule may sometimes laugh men out of their faults; advice may correct; reason may reform; but very few, I believe, have ever grown better by anger, or wiser by resentment. It is always the angry man's peculiar misfortune that the louder he talks, the less he is heard, and the more he says, the less he is attended to; his arrows either fly with so much speed that they overshoot the mark, or are so ill-directed that they pass by on one side of it. Add to this the consideration, that one half of those things which raise our indignation, do perhaps better become our laughter, and the other rather deserve our pity. We should not therefore most assuredly venture our own character, and our own peace, without the least prospect of restoring our neighbour's, or be so absurd as to imagine that one man's folly can correct another's error, or one man's vice render another virtuous.

But

But Secondly, The angry man must be a fool, because he destroys his own character and reputation in the world, because he is sure to meet not only with disappointment but also with contempt. Anger is so very unfit to perform the office which it assumes, that like a partial magistrate, it condemns without trial, and executes without judgment; passes an arbitrary sentence before examination, and often punishes the fault before it is committed.

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As nothing therefore is so mean as the proud man, nothing is so humble as the angry man; for when he has been enraged beyond reason, he must also, in his turn, be submissive beyond measure; he is always committing a crime, and always asking pardon for it; compelled often to stoop to those who are beneath him, and even to ask forgiveness of those

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who have offended him : so that, like a rash and ill-advised general, if he rushes forward with boldness and precipitancy, he meets with death and destruction, as a madman ; and if he retreats, he is branded with shame and ignominy, as a coward.

But Thirdly, Anger always destroys our own peace and tranquillity. As the angry man cannot possibly impart pleasure to the breasts of others, so is he utterly incapable of feeling it in his own : a certain degree of tranquillity is indispensably necessary towards the enjoyment of every human happiness. He who is tossed to and fro by the violence of the tempest, will scarce be delighted by the beauty of the prospect ; and the man who is consumed by a fever, will give but little attention to the sumptuousness of the apartment where he lies, or the elegance
of

of the furniture which surrounds him; and in the same manner, it is impossible that the angry man should partake of the pleasures of society, because his mind is never sufficiently at leisure to enjoy it; his soul, even when the violence of passion is appeased, resembles the ocean after a storm; it is a long time before the waves subside; it is still, as the prophet says, *like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*; there is no peace to the angry and wicked,

As a quiet and easy disposition therefore is its own reward, so an angry and unquiet one is its own punishment.

But moreover the angry man can never be confided in as a friend; but, as the son of Sirach says, anger separateth friends, because passion will betray every secret; forget every benefit: remember every in-

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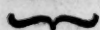
jury ; spy out every fault ; and be blind
to every virtue.

The angry man will never be sought after or admitted as a companion, because his wit, if he has any, will often be soured by ill-nature, his judgment warped by passion, his good-breeding totally lost and swallowed up by resentment. He who is of a disposition to be angry, will never be at a loss for an occasion to be so ; because the least trifle will enflame, and the least opposition will enrage him. His conversation therefore, instead of recommending will only prejudice him, and the qualities which would make another amiable, will only render him odious and detestable ; the faults of men generally leave a stronger impression than their virtues ; and what the angry man has spoke in the warmth of passion, will be remembered

bered when every thing else that he has said shall be forgotten.

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But what is most peculiarly observable of this passion is, that it hath a kind of supernatural and magic power, which converts us as it were into creatures of another nature. Observe the courteous and polite man when inflamed with anger; where is the affability which endeared; where is the good breeding which recommended him? His civility is changed in a moment into rudeness, and all the sweetness of his manners degenerated into savageness and brutality; every word is an oath, and every sentence a reproof; so that the amiable companion is no longer seen, and the kind and affectionate friend is no longer known to you. Observe the mild and good-natured man, when passion overrules and overtakes him; his benevolence is changed into rancour;

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his love and tenderness into spleen and malignity ; his eyes, which once softened into tears at the distresses of his fellow creatures, shall sparkle with unusual joy at their calamity ; *that* shall fill his heart with pleasure, which used to create pain ; and he is even miserable *himself*, because he cannot make others unhappy.

Observe the learned, the sensible, the wise man when angry ; observe him who pretends to be master of all his passions, how totally and absolutely he is subdued by one. His ideas, which he had taken so much pains to range in order, are on a sudden all confused and displaced ; passion clouds over the intellectual beams of his understanding, impairs his faculties, and, like the veil of night, buries all his perfections in one inseparable mass of darkness and oblivion. His learning will at that time only furnish him per-
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haps with additional matter of abuse; and his knowledge, if any remains, but adds fuel to his malice, or administers food to his revenge.

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If we are any of us then subject to this passion, we are not to flatter ourselves that wisdom or knowledge will secure us from the ill effects of it, because we see it has the extraordinary power to alter the very natures and dispositions of those whom it attacks: and thus, though it came into the breast of a wise man, may even, without changing its habitation, rest in the bosom of a fool.

But to make this passion still more detestable, let us observe that it not only, as in the examples I have just now mentioned, affects our public character, but that it destroys every enjoyment, and undermines every felicity in private life; it
breaks

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breaks through all the ties of kindred, and loosens all the bonds of natural affection.

The angry parent throws aside all love and regard; the angry child forgets all duty and obedience; the sister loses her tenderness, and the brother his care and affection; the most chearful and the most amiable companion becomes morose and churlish, and the bosom friend is turned into an implacable enemy.

An angry husband therefore must make his wife unhappy; an angry father must make his children miserable; an angry master must make his servants wretched.

Let us therefore draw all our dissuasive arguments into these few short but indisputable conclusions.

We cannot be angry with our superiors, without hazarding either the
breach

breach of our duty, or the loss of our interest.

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We cannot be angry with our equals, without losing all their love and affection.

We cannot be angry with our inferiors, without parting from all our power and authority over them.

But Lastly, my brethren, if anger doth little become a man, still less doth it become a Christian; it very ill becometh us who are bound in the most solemn manner, by the precepts of our holy religion, to mutual peace, love, and forgiveness.

We are not to put on the bloody robes of anger and revenge, but to cloath ourselves in the modest garb of meekness
and

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and humility. If we *are* angry, we should be angry at ourselves; we should turn aside our indignation against the sins of others, and confine all our resentment to our own: *here* self-love will prevent excess, and we shall reap all the benefits and advantages of the passion, without any of the dangers or ill consequences of it. Add to this also, that the more thoroughly we are convinced of our own unworthiness, the readier shall we be to pardon that of our neighbour, and learn from thence to be reconciled to others, that God may be reconciled to us; to please, that we may be pleased; to forgive, that we may be forgiven.

To conclude, then: I have dwelt the longer, and with the greater warmth inveighed against this passion, because the avoidance of it is of the utmost consequence

quence to us, and in this we are all most nearly and intimately concerned.

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Let experience then, let example, let reason and religion teach us to avoid it, for the future, as I have proved to you, anger defeats its own end and purpose, hurts our character and reputation, and destroys our peace and happiness; it makes us uneasy to ourselves, hateful to man, and unacceptable to God.

If our health is precious, if reputation is dear to us, if there be any thing dreadful in noise, clamours, and confusion, any thing delightful in joy and tranquillity; if we hope, in short, for peace here, and pardon hereafter, *let us not be hasty in our spirit to be angry, for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.*

Let us then place before our eyes the great model and standard of perfection,
the

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the example of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, the meek and humble Jesus; let us behold him languishing under evil, submitting to all the bitterness of reproach, spurned, buffeted, despised, and rejected of men, oppressed by his enemies, and deserted by his friends, yet bearing all with patience and resignation; without anger and invective; angry, he answered not; when he was reviled, he reviled not again.

Finally, then, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things; and the God of peace be with you.

ON

F O R G I V E N E S S .

FORGIVENESS

S E R M O N XXVIII.

LUKE VI. 37.

Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.

FORGIVENESS of injuries may be ranked amongst those singular and exalted virtues which all men universally agree to praise and admire, but very few have strength and resolution to practise. It seemeth indeed to soar above the common perfections of our nature, and to shine with a superior lustre, and is therefore highly becoming the purest and most refined religion, the religion of Jesus Christ; who did himself not only strongly enforce it by his doctrine, but most

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powerfully recommend it also by his own
divine example.

But whilst we so justly admire the peculiar grace, dignity, and perfection of this truly Christian virtue, we cannot at the same time but acknowledge, that there is no small difficulty in the attainment of it: it is a part, and doubtless a very considerable one, of the duty of self-denial, and in direct opposition to some of our most violent and unruly passions, who will strenuously oppose it with all their strength and vigour. The victory over such powerful and conspiring foes cannot, we must own, be an easy, though it must always prove a glorious conquest.

Judgment, humility, patience, and fortitude, are all necessary to form a kind and forgiving temper: we must have judgment to distinguish, patience and hu-
mility

mility to suffer, generosity and fortitude to condemn injuries, before we can rightly, easily, and heartily forgive them.

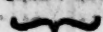
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In the following discourse therefore I design to enforce and recommend that union and love which are the distinguishing marks of Christianity. I shall endeavour to point out to you the necessity of mutual forgiveness, by convincing you,

First, That revenge is directly contrary to our duty both towards God and towards man : And,

Secondly, That it is contrary also to our interest, and our happiness, both in relation to this life, and that which is to come.

And First, then : Revenge is directly contrary to our duty towards God and man.

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To submit ourselves with pious resignation to the will of our Creator, to rely on him under every evil, oppression, and calamity, is the least return which we can make for all the unmerited blessings which he bestoweth on us. When we are injured and oppressed, therefore, it will become us to consider, first, that we are not proper judges either of the nature or degree of the injury received by us, and, secondly, that though *we* are not proper judges, God undoubtedly *is*; to him therefore, and to him alone, should be left the estimation and the punishment also.

God, whose mercy is over all his works, hath graciously ordained, that even our wants and imperfections should be of advantage to us, and that both our weakness and our ignorance should contribute to our happiness. Man is neither wise
enough

enough to discern, nor powerful enough to punish, all the injuries which are done unto him. Were he indeed to know all those which were intended against him, it would only poison his happiness, give him a disgust of human nature, and make him perhaps out of love with his very being; he would then be perpetually employed either in acts of revenge, or in the design and meditation of them; and no less guilty would he be, were it always in his power to punish them.

There are certain discordant powers in nature, which, if suffered to meet and oppose each other, would shock the frame of things, and destroy the whole universe: these therefore the wisdom of the Almighty hath separated and kept asunder. And in like manner, if all the injuries that are done by man to man were to be fully and amply revenged, there would be

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nothing but discord and confusion amongst us, and the world would be a perpetual scene of war and bloodshed; but the injured are not permitted to meet and oppose each other. Add to this, that for the most part we are made so dependant one upon another, that we *dare* not, or so equal in power and abilities that we CAN not revenge as we would, and thus are we constrained as it were to be easy and satisfied whether we will or not.

When we look through the glass of human reason, we are very apt to turn the wrong end of the perspective, to diminish and set at distance the favours and benefits, to bring near and to magnify all the injuries which we receive. We make use of false weights and measures, and then unjustly complain that we have been defrauded. We *think of ourselves*, as St. Paul says, *more highly than we ought*
to

to think, and consequently over-rate every affront that is offered to us. When men are intoxicated with pride, it is no wonder that every injury should appear double: like the unjust steward, instead of putting down forty, we write fourscore, and are resolved to compel the debtor to pay to the uttermost farthing. But on this occasion we should always remember, that the true merit of every action, can only be determined by it's motive; and not from the effect, but the design, must arise the guilt of the offender. Such is the uncertainty of all human affairs, such influence have accident and circumstance over all our concerns, that a very great injury hath often been done where very little hath been intended. Unless therefore we had that knowledge, which, whilst on earth, we can never attain unto; unless we could see the hearts and thoughts of men, we can never be proper

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and adequate judges either of the nature or degree of the injuries which we receive. When therefore we have been ill-treated, abused, or calumniated by our fellow-creatures, we ought charitably to suppose that they may have been misled and mistaken in their opinions of us; that their understandings may be weak, their prejudices deeply rooted, their resentments, like our own, too strong; that it may be the head, and not the heart, which is to blame; and that, after all, they perhaps by no means intended to hurt us so much as they really do.

It will therefore become us to consider, that if, as it plainly appears from what I have just now observed, we are not proper judges of the injuries we receive, God and God only most undoubtedly *is*. He to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secret is hid ;

hid ; he who knoweth the very thoughts of men, the motive, end, and design of every word and every action, he it is who will determine aright : he alone, who knows the guilt of the offender, can punish him as he ought to be punished : and as he is able, so is he willing also to act for us ; *he is a Father to the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widow.* Why, then, should we ever desire to speak in our own cause, when we have such an advocate to plead for us ? Why should we be so eager to fight our own battles, when we have so powerful a leader to avenge us ?

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, and I will repay. Shall we then doubt his truth, or shall we dispute his power ? shall we, after this gracious declaration, employ ourselves in an office so unbecoming our duty, and at the same time so unfit
for

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for us? shall we wrest the sword of justice from the only hand that is able to wield it? or assume to ourselves that office which he alone can execute? What is this, but to dispute his right, to encroach upon his prerogative, to deny his attribute, distrust his word, and give the lie to the Father of truth?

But Secondly, As revenge is contrary to our duty, so is it likewise repugnant to our interest and to our happiness both here and hereafter.

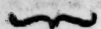
Forgiveness of injuries is a virtue so necessary to the being and welfare of society, that it is impossible to pass our lives in any tolerable degree of pleasure or satisfaction without it. We are all guilty of mistakes in our conduct, and errors both of judgment and of will: we all of us both too often act foolishly, most
of

of us at some time of our lives wickedly and injuriously to one another, and yet we will not forgive.

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Were man an innocent being that he could not commit crimes, were he an omniscient being to discern, or omnipotent to punish them, he might then indeed have a right to retain his anger, and to satiate his revenge: but surely it is most astonishing to reflect, that he who is so guilty, should be so proud; that he who is so weak, should be so determined; that he whose days are but a span, who, like the grass, *flourisheth in the morning, and in the evening is cut down and withered*; that he should thus both impiously and ridiculously desire to carry his resentments beyond the grave, and to make his enmities immortal!

On benevolence and good-will one towards another, must in a great measure depend

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depend all our private happiness. This is the great chain which holds together all the ties of human society, and all the bonds of natural affection: without this it is impossible for friend to live with friend, master and servant, parent and child, brother and sister, man and wife, for any of the relations and connections of this life to subsist, with any degree of mutual pleasure or advantage: and yet, how often have the closest ties been dissolved by the want of love, pity, and forgiveness, and the fountain of domestic happiness embittered by revenge!

Rage will sometimes transport, and passion betray us into the most cruel insults, even on those whom we most love and esteem. A single injury committed on the one hand from inadvertency, and received on the other with all the warmth and resentment, hath sown the seeds of division

vision in a happy family, which could never be rooted out; and thus the beautiful structure of love and harmony, which perhaps it had been the labour of years to raise and support, shall be thrown down in a moment, and buried in ruins.

But the duty of forgiveness will appear still more evident when we come to consider, that we not only constantly stand in need of it from each other, but that we all stand in need of forgiveness from God also.

There is a Supreme and Almighty Being, whom we have every one of us frequently and grievously offended, and yet who is doubtless the last whom we should dare to offend. If we are revengeful towards our fellow-creatures, their oppression and injustice may in some measure alleviate our guilt: but when we offend
God,

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God, we offend one who never wronged or injured, never could merit any ill-treatment from us ; but who, on the other hand, is continually pouring down upon us blessings which we have no claim to, and mercies which we have never deserved. It is indeed astonishing that men should so inconsiderately affront the great Lord and giver of life : they forget that he is, as the Psalmist saith, a righteous and strong judge, and only remember that he is patient ; and therefore they provoke him every day.

What then shall we plead in our defence, or how shall we reconcile ourselves to the divine favour ?

One condition we know there is absolutely and indispensibly necessary, and that is, that we forgive : *forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. If you forgive men their trespasses,*

trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses. The mercy of God is our only sanctuary, the only asylum where we can shelter ourselves from the divine justice. But what shall save that man whom even the mercy of God condemneth?

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But this is withal a condition ratified by our own consent, and which therefore we are bound most punctually and religiously to perform. In what manner do we every day address the Supreme Being? *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us, &c.* Shall our mouths so belie our hearts, as, when we put up this petition, to nourish in them thoughts of malice and revenge? This would be a solemn mockery, an impious defiance of a just and good God, which

we

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XXVIII.we may rest assured he will undoubtedly
punish.

To conclude then : Mercy is the darling attribute of the Deity, and the more we practise it, the nearer shall we approach to the divine nature. It is evident from what I have already suggested to you, that we are not able to judge, with any degree of certainty, of the real or supposed injuries which we receive, and consequently are very unfit to take upon us the office of punishment or retaliation. It is at the same time no less evident, that God, and God only, is the proper judge, that he hath graciously condescended to take our cause into his own hands. It is therefore highly injurious to his honour, as well as prejudicial to our own interest, to wrest it from him. It is withal demonstrable, from every day's and every hour's experience, that

that we all stand in need of forgiveness from our neighbour, and are therefore strictly bound to give that which we ourselves expect to receive. And lastly, nothing can be more plain and self-evident than that all our hopes of forgiveness from a justly offended God, must spring from our readiness to forgive our fellow-creatures.

If any of us then have received, or imagine that we have received any injuries, however great and galling they may be, and have not yet entirely, heartily, and sincerely forgiven them, let us, I beseech you, immediately set about this necessary and important duty. If men have treated us with cruelty and injustice, let us consider that they *are* men, subject to human frailties and passions; frailties to which we may ourselves be subject, and passions whose power and influence we are no strangers to.

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Let us then prostrate ourselves with all humility before the throne of grace, and implore the divine Being to send down upon us a portion of his own infinite mercy : that he will open our eyes to see, and our hearts to commiserate the weakness and infirmities of human nature, that so we may be inclined to pardon and forgive them ; that in the last and great day, we may not tremble to appear before his dread tribunal, but rest with confidence on the goodness and mercy of that God, who, on the intercession of our fellow-creatures, whose offences *we* had forgiven, shall graciously receive *us* to his mercy, pardon our offences, and for our kind and tender behaviour to our neighbour in this life, reward us with everlasting joy and happiness in that which is to come.

ON THE
BENEVOLENT SPIRIT
OF
CHRISTIANITY.

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S E R M O N XXIX.

LUKE IX. 56.

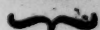
*The Son of man is not come to destroy men's
lives, but to save them.*

AS our blessed Saviour was passing through the country of the Samaritans, in his way to Jerusalem, he sent some messengers before him into one of their villages, to provide an entertainment for himself and his attendants: but the inhabitants knowing him to be a Jew, and that he was going to worship at Jerusalem, from the rooted enmity and hatred which they had to that whole nation, on account of some religious dif-

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ferences, refused to receive him : a treatment which so enflamed the spirit of James and John, two of our Lord's disciples, that they immediately, in the warmth of their zeal, cried out, *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?* Our Saviour, notwithstanding he had been so grossly affronted, was so far from approving this their zeal, that he rejected their proposal with the utmost indignation, and rebuked them, saying, *ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* As if he had said,

Ye do not consider, thoughtless and ignorant as ye are, what a vile and wicked spirit that must be which dictates so much inhumanity; how impossible it is for me to comply with a request so irreconcilable with my appearance in the world,

world, which is to do no harm, but all possible good to all mankind; not only to confer eternal salvation on them in the next life, but likewise to consult their present welfare and happiness in this; to establish human society in peace and good order, and to contribute to the security, comfort, and true enjoyment of life.

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This gracious declaration of our blessed Lord and Redeemer, cannot but afford us, on a serious consideration, many useful lessons and instructions, and convince us that by his appearance on earth he consulted the real happiness of mankind, as well in regard to this world, as to that which is to come.

It might very justly indeed be expected, that when our Saviour appeared as a divine messenger, and the institutor of a religion which was to be propagated

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among all nations, that he would have a particular regard to the peace of the world, and make the advancement of it one principal part of his concern. It is not to be supposed that God would send a person into the world, to deliver in his name, a law or rule of life to mankind, which would take no care of *them*, or their interests: it might on the other hand naturally be presumed that such an institution would be chiefly intended to promote their *happiness*, and that whilst it effectually secured that happiness in another world, it would likewise provide for that part of it which may be enjoyed by them in *this*: without this design indeed, it would not be possible for any revelation to engage the attention and favour of mankind.

Accordingly when our Saviour appeared as a prophet sent from God, he brought
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with him that most necessary qualification, and which would be most useful to him in his divine mission, a kind and beneficent intention : he soon convinced mankind that he came not to promote any selfish ends and interests of his own, that his designs were noble and generous, not only to confirm the timorous and diffident in the joyful hope of immortality, but to render their condition here easy and agreeable, to diffuse a spirit of peace, harmony and love through human society, and to make the world a scene of constant serenity, delight and satisfaction.

This was the true end and design of our Saviour's appearance, the business which he heartily and sincerely prosecuted during his stay on earth, as will more fully and plainly appear from what I propose in the present discourse to consider ; namely,

First,

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First, The nature and tendency of that religion which he has instituted.

Secondly, The example which he has proposed to the imitation of his followers. And,

Thirdly, The many benefits and advantages naturally resulting from our strict and regular observance of it.

And First, therefore, let us consider the nature and tendency of the Christian institution, which is perfectly calculated for promoting the present interest of men, and making the societies of the world flourish and prosper. The greatest part of man's private happiness must undoubtedly arise from a virtuous temper and state of mind, and a course of actions agreeable to it; from humanity, justice, and kindness to men; from love, gratitude and obedience to God.

It

It is at the same time no less evident, that the greatest happiness of society proceeds from the virtue and good conduct of men, from their being well-affected towards the public, and employing their several powers and abilities to promote the common good, and from the regular performance of every social and relative duty : if this must be granted, it is easy to shew the tendency of the Christian religion to promote the present happiness of men, and the peace and welfare of this world, as the great end and design of the gospel of Christ is to press and inculcate all those virtues which are the sources both of public and of private happiness. It insists particularly upon those duties and virtues, the practice of which affects the order and welfare of the public, commanding all men to fulfil the duties of their several relations, to be laborious and diligent in their calling, to be honest and just

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just in all their dealings, to cultivate a spirit of harmony and meekness, of forgiveness, condescension, and universal benevolence. These are the essential parts of our holy religion, the marks by which we are (or should be) known as Christians, the most acceptable services that we can offer to Almighty God, and far more pleasing to him than any of the instituted parts of his own worship ; and these must be performed by us, if ever we hope for the favour of our great Creator either here or hereafter. Thus is it to the last degree evident, that the Christian religion has the plainest tendency to promote the happiness of society in general, and of every individual in it.

But Secondly, It will further appear, that our blessed Saviour designed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind in this present world, from considering
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that example which he has proposed to the imitation of his followers: his behaviour was intirely conformable to this doctrine, full of justice, meekness, patience, forbearance, compassion, and charity to all mankind: he never expressed any resentment against those who had cruelly and despitefully used him, never rendered evil for evil, or railing for railing: not all the ungrateful returns which he met with, not all the base constructions which were put on his words and actions, could divert him from his first great and noble purpose; still he went about doing good, giving mankind an example that they should follow his steps, advising them to learn of *him*, who is meek and lowly in heart; and intreating them that they would love one another as he loved *them*.

Hence it is most evident that our Lord did truly consult the peace and welfare
of

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of this world, since he not only made the promoting of them the constant concern and business of his life, but engaged his followers to make it the business of *their* lives *also*, by the influence of his amiable example.

Having thus briefly illustrated the truth of our Saviour's assertion, concerning his coming to promote the welfare and happiness of this world, I shall proceed to the consideration of a few of those useful lessons and instructions which will naturally arise from our conviction of it.

And First, then, We may see what great reason there is for approving and valuing the Christian religion, which is so intirely calculated for the benefit and interest of mankind. How vast, how astonishing is the difference between the religion of Christ, and the religions which prevail in many parts of the world ;
which,

which, instead of contributing to the ease and comfort of their possessors, engage them to the observance of many idle and burthensome superstitions, and fill their minds with anguish and disquietude; which, instead of promoting the public good, tend to the destruction of mankind, and introduce nothing but misery and confusion into society, which is plainly the tendency of most of the false religions which are at this day admitted in the world.

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But nothing like this can be objected against the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, which is altogether pure and peaceable, which has the kindest, most benignant influence over all the affairs of human society, endeavouring to subdue all those evil and corrupt affections which destroy our peace and undermine our happiness; to inculcate and recommend all

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all those virtues which promote universal justice, love, and harmony amongst men : this spirit of peace breathes throughout the whole Gospel of Christ. It is indeed unaccountable that any who are really friends to the cause of virtue and the interests of mankind, should ever oppose an institution, the design of which is so useful and so benevolent. If the intrinsic goodness of Christianity is not of itself sufficient to prove it an institution from heaven, it should, at least, incline men to entertain a favourable opinion of it, should prevent (one would imagine) their taking up any groundless prejudices against it, and much more their using any dishonest arts (which notwithstanding have too frequently been used) for overthrowing it : this should rather prepossess them in its favour, and make them wish to see the truth and divinity of it fully proved, beyond the power

power of gainsayers to confute it. Not that we are to look upon Christianity only as a useful scheme of philosophy, a merely human institution, (which is all that some persons will allow it to be;) for besides its containing a most pure and benevolent doctrine, it has moreover been confirmed, we know, by such extraordinary works and wonders as sufficiently declare it to be of an heavenly and divine original, which every man who examines it with attention and impartiality must be thoroughly convinced of.

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But Secondly, It follows from what has been said, that the confusions and mischiefs which Christianity hath occasioned in the world (the ambitious worldly views which have been carried on under the cover of it) are by no means to be attributed to our holy religion, or any of those principles which it inculcates.

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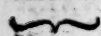

Too certain it is, that the good and benevolent institution of the Gospel, hath not universally produced its true and proper effects on the minds of men: far from having always been the means of subduing the fierceness of their tempers, of reconciling their differences, and uniting them in the bonds of friendship, charity, and peace, it has often proved, on the contrary, an occasion of the bitterest hatred and animosities, and of filling the world with party rage, violence, and inhumanity.

It would be an unnecessary, and an ungrateful task, to enumerate the various persecutions and barbarities that have been practised, by Christians against Christians, under the specious pretences of religious zeal, tho' directly inconsistent with the precepts of that Gospel which they were so solemnly bound to obey.

Too

Too many instances are to be met with even to this day. Our Saviour himself, foresaw and foretold that his holy religion, which is in its nature so meek and charitable, would by the perverseness of mankind become productive of strife, divisions and cruelties, and that men would say he came not to send peace upon earth, but a sword. Accordingly Christianity, instead of uniting men in the bond of peace, became the source of hatred and animosity amongst them: ecclesiastical is (perhaps) more full than civil history of rancour and malevolence, of blood and slaughter, of every thing that debases and degrades human nature: nor is this at all to be wondered at, when we consider how men had perverted and disguised it; when we reflect how the word of God has been at various times wrested and distorted from its plain and original sense, to carry on the schemes and promote the



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interests of wicked and designing men. But whatever distractions and miseries have happened, certain it is that the guilt of them can never be fixed on Christianity; they are not its true and genuine production, not the natural fruit of that tree, but what hath been grafted on it; nor is Christianity any more answerable for them, than philosophy, civil government, or any of the most wise and useful institutions of men, are to be blamed for the evils to which, contrary to their own tendency and designs, they have been made subservient. It will rather on the other hand, (with the thinking and considerate) be an argument in its favour, that men have always been so willing to shelter beneath this sacred veil, designs which they knew they could not well accomplish without the influence of its name and authority: if its tenets had not been good, they would

would not have been thus abused ; if its doctrines had not been pure, they would not have been thus perverted.

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Thirdly, From what hath been here observed, we may learn, how utterly irreconcilable with Christianity all those doctrines and principles are, which are prejudicial to the interests of mankind, which tend either to destroy or diminish the happiness of human society. Of this kind there have been, and still continue to be too many amongst all the professors of Christianity, and more especially among those of the church of Rome, to the great reproach of the Gospel, and the infinite prejudice of all mankind. Such, for instance, is that fatal and pernicious doctrine which teaches men, under the specious pretence to extraordinary goodness and piety, and leading a more sublime and spiritual life, to withdraw from the

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world, and all the concerns of it, and to give themselves up intirely to the exercises of meditation, reading, fasting, and prayer. The consequence of which has been, the rendering vast multitudes of people not only insignificant and useles, but very expensive and burthensome to society.

Of the same kind, and perhaps even attended with still more destructive consequences, is the doctrine of propagating religion by external force; which hath been often put in practice, not only to the discouragement and suppression of virtue and piety, but to the total subversion of all the most important rights and privileges of men, to the violation of all the order and peace of the public, to the committing of the most horrid outrages and cruelties, and the turning whole countries into fields of blood,

Of



Of the same nature and tendency are the doctrines concerning the supremacy of the Pope ; the deposing of princes, and absolving subjects from their allegiance ; the spiritual power which the church of Rome hath assumed, of shutting up and opening the kingdom of heaven, of binding and loosing, retaining and remitting sins ; doctrines which have been the perpetual source of general confusion and universal calamity.

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These and all such pernicious tenets are directly opposite to the righteous and merciful principles of the Gospel of Christ, and so far as they take effect, entirely destructive of the design of it. Men may pretend to a more than ordinary zeal for the cause of God and his Son, but whilst they act in such direct opposition to the great and evident design of the Gospel, every man who has the least de-

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gree of sense and reflection, must see the hypocrisy of their pretences, and that the spirit which really actuates them is totally different from the spirit of Christianity.

Lastly, From what has been said, we may learn how much it should be the concern and business of every one of us to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures, and to do good in the world : this is what nature dictates, and religion binds upon us : the only method of approving ourselves sincere and good Christians is to cultivate in ourselves a temper of universal justice, meekness, and benevolence, and to be as useful to mankind as our several stations and capacities will permit us to be. There are some (too many perhaps) who imagine that they can sufficiently discharge the obligations of their religion, by being barely just and honest,

honest, and abstaining from all positive wrongs and injuries, without the practice of one moral or social virtue, looking upon certain points of faith, defended with zeal, together with a punctual attendance on all the external forms of devotion, as the only things of moment, and the very height and perfection of Christianity; but these are absurd and gross mistakes, which it is hardly to be supposed men can possibly fall into, without the most criminal negligence and inattention, according to the plainest and most obvious notions which both reason and revelation give us of true religion: it is undoubtedly intended for the benefit of the world, for making mankind live so as to be both happy in themselves, and kind and beneficent to one another; and this effect it will most certainly produce in us, if we duly attend to it, and are governed by its authority.

To



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To conclude, then : *The Son of man* came into the world *not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* How many amongst those who call themselves Christians act the direct contrary parts, spend their whole lives in embittering the lives of others, rail at, oppress and persecute their fellow-creatures, and seem as if (in opposition to their great Master) they came into the world not to *save* men's lives, but to *destroy* them. Let us, my brethren, adhere to the great example and standard of perfection, Jesus Christ the righteous : let us by every method in our power endeavour to promote the peace, welfare, and happiness of society, and of every individual in it : let us endeavour to instruct, and not to perplex, to save, and not to destroy : let us not, by our idle and fruitless dissensions about matters, in themselves frivolous and indifferent, break the chain of love and harmony

harmony which should link us together ; but let us endeavour to strengthen it by the bonds of mutual love and affection ; let us shew ourselves followers of Christ by imitating his conduct ; so shall we ensure to ourselves the applause of our own conscience, the approbation and friendship of all good men in this life, and the certain and well-grounded hopes of everlasting peace, joy, and happiness, in that which is to come.

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ON THE  
V A N I T Y  
OF  
H U M A N W I S D O M.



# S E R M O N   X X X .

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ECCLESIASTES I. 18.

*In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*

**S**OLOMON, the supposed author of the book of Ecclesiastes, one of the greatest, and doubtless one of the wisest of the sons of men, describes himself, in the verses preceding my text, as setting out in the pursuit of happiness, that great and ultimate end of all our wishes and desires : and if real, solid, and permanent happiness were a treasure ever to be acquired by man, Solomon would most probably have attained unto it, as he omitted no method which reason could

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could suggest, or which understanding and experience could point out to him; being, as we learn from his whole history, as recorded in holy writ, endowed with more than common penetration and sagacity, with knowledge not less extensive than his power, and as superior to the rest of mankind in parts and capacity, as in wealth and dominion. We are not therefore surprised to find him, in his search after this great object, applying himself sedulously to the cultivation of his mind, paying the tribute due to wisdom, and giving the deserved preference to learning and knowledge. *I communed* says he, *with mine own heart, saying, Lo ! I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem ; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.* And yet, after all his toil and labour, we behold him returning from his journey  
fatigued

fatigued and disappointed, making at last this sad and solemn reflection, *I have seen*, says he, *all the things that are under the sun: and behold! all is vanity and vexation of spirit: for in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*

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The preacher could not perhaps have uttered a sentence more mortifying to human pride, or more grating to human ambition; and yet, as he could have no intention to deceive, no interest that could induce him to mislead us, we, on our parts, should seriously consider what those very cogent and powerful reasons were, which urged him to publish a truth so disagreeable, and obliged him to draw so melancholy a conclusion.

And First, then, The most natural reflection that occurred to the royal mo-

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nitor on this subject, and which we may suppose contributed in a great measure to establish this opinion, was probably the weakness and insufficiency of all human knowledge.

Those who have been at the pains to think at all (which is not indeed the talent of every man) agree in acknowledging that there is no labour so intense, or so fatiguing, as the labour of the mind; and that the acquisition of knowledge is a work of greater toil and trouble than the acquisition of any thing else: few things, notwithstanding, will be found on examination, so ill to repay our cares, or so poorly to recompense our solicitude: one would moreover be inclined to think that the difficulty of the conquest would enhance both the glory and the pleasure of the triumph; but the truth is, that this victory, like many others, may be bought

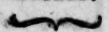


bought too dear ; it may be bought, we shall find, at the expence of our peace and tranquility, at the expence of our honour and virtue, at the expence in short of all our pleasure, and all our happiness : and who, in either of these circumstances, will compliment us on our choice, or who will envy us the purchase ?

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Ask the man who travels through the paths of science, if they are not obstructed with thorns and briars on every side ? if he doth not meet with repeated obstacles, and is not stopped on his journey by a thousand disappointments ? he will tell you, that the hopes of men deceive, that their faculties desert, and their powers betray them : that where they expected to have conquered every difficulty, and met with thorough conviction, doubts have arisen on a sudden to obscure,



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and mazes to perplex the understanding ; *the eye, as Solomon says, is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with bearing :* the minutest parts of the creation seem frequently, as it were, to mock our search, and purposely to expose the pride and insolence of those, who would reveal its secrets ; and the ways of nature, like those of her divine Parent, are past finding out.

We boast, indeed, the wide and extensive field of human knowledge, and yet are perpetually ignorant even of the things which lie before us ; the modest and diffident alone, will condescend to acknowledge their incapacity ; they who have amassed the greatest treasures of wisdom, are always the most ready to own their poverty ; and those who have toiled through the whole round of science, are best acquainted with the narrowness of the circle.

circle. Socrates, the wisest of the heathen philosophers, is reported to have said, "that all he knew was, that he knew nothing;" and our royal monitor hath, in the words of my text, made an acknowledgment very similar unto it. No man therefore hath a right to boast of wisdom, unless he hath more than fell to the share of Socrates or Solomon; and the proudest may doubtless be taught humility, by reflecting, that he who amongst men had most knowledge, confessed that he "knew nothing," and he who had most wisdom, pronounced it to be *vanity and vexation of spirit*.

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But if the weakness and insufficiency of all human knowledge, will not convince us of that truth which Solomon here declared; let us candidly examine whether it hath always the power, as some imagine, to make us either happier

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or better. And to this end let us turn our eyes towards those who are called the wise and learned of this world, to the proud possessors of human wisdom and knowledge.

The palate, we may observe, which is too nice and delicate, which nauseates common food, and must be fed with dainties, is seldom pleased or satisfied; and in the same manner, he whose notions of things are too nice, whose taste is too delicate and refined, deprives himself of half the joys of life, and cuts himself off from half the pleasures of society.

Mark the ignorant and illiterate part of mankind. Do they not taste the benefits of nature and enjoy the common blessings of life with more spirit and cheerfulness, than the grave and learned, whose brows perhaps are knit with care,  
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and whose avenues to joy, are shut up by  
thoughtfulness and solicitude ?

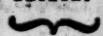
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There is, besides, a pride and superciliousness sometimes attendant on the votaries of wisdom and admirers of human learning, which renders them very uneasy to themselves, and very disagreeable to all about them.

The wise man is exalted to such an eminence, that he cannot stoop to converse or associate with his fellow-creatures ; he is above the follies and weaknesses, but at the same time above the comforts and conveniencies of life ; removed from the vices and dangers, but removed also from all the mutual gratifications, and all the sweet endearments of society ; insomuch, that in his gloomy hours of retirement, he often laments that knowledge which makes him grave,

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and that wisdom which renders him unhappy; he finds, after all his labours, that he has only been indefatigable in the pursuit of misery, and been extremely industrious to procure anxiety; and even sometimes obliged, in spite of his pride and superiority, to wish for that ignorance which he despises, and to envy that very folly which he condemns.

*Surely in such wisdom there must be grief, and he that increaseth such knowledge increaseth sorrow.*

What then are the great and boasted pleasures which flow from the admired fountains of wisdom and knowledge? Our wisdom only enables us to discover our folly, and present knowledge but serves to betray past ignorance; the pride which arises from being what we *are*, is checked and chastised by the remembrance

brance of what we *have* been; and the pleasure of possession is more than compensated by the pain of reproach.

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But Lastly, It is but too evident, that wisdom and knowledge do not make us happier.

Let us examine, which is of still greater importance, whether they make us better.

But farther, If as science and literature extended themselves, true wisdom and virtue had extended also, we must doubtless have been much wiser, and much better than our ancestors; but, to multiply books is not always to multiply knowledge, and the improvement in arts is not certain to be accompanied with an improvement in goodness; so far from it, that with all the advantages we possess  
over



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over former times, we abound as much in vain wisdom and false philosophy, in folly, vice and irreligion, as perhaps any of our Pagan predecessors.

We are too apt indeed to speak with contempt of the heathen world, to deride their tenets, and to abhor their immoralities ; but let us imagine one of them revisiting the earth, and placed among us in these our days ; let him be an eye-witness of our corruption, let him hear our profaneness, oaths, and licentiousness : would he think we had any reason to condemn the times that were past ? that we had any pretensions to magnify our superior wisdom, or to boast of our superior virtue ?

In regard to our own times, and to bring the matter home to ourselves, it is indisputable that we greatly excel our  
ancestors

ancestors in the conveniencies and in the elegancies of life; that knowledge of every kind is become more general, science and literature more universal, than in the ages before us. But then, to our shame and ignominy, it is equally indisputable, that we are by no means inferior to them in our corruption and depravity; that, even in an open contempt of the doctrines of the Gospel and the revelation of God's word, vices have sprung up amongst us, which were unknown to our less guilty predecessors, and crimes which would have disgraced the dark ages of barbarity and paganism, have been reserved to distinguish the enlightened æra of Christianity.

So far was earthly wisdom and knowledge from making men wiser and better, more conscientious or religious; that it was, on the other hand, the principal  
cause

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cause of that corruption and degeneracy, which prevailed in the world at the time of the Christian dispensation; when God sent down his Son to confute the wisdom of the wise; when, *out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he ordained strength*; when a set of ignorant and illiterate men were inspired by the Holy Spirit, to overthrow all the superb edifices of vain wisdom and false philosophy, and by the immediate power of God to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

What then are the inferences to be drawn, or what are the determinations which will result from the conviction of this solemn truth?

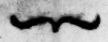
Must we give up all our title to, and all our search after wisdom and knowledge? must we suffer our understandings to remain uncultivated, and our faculties



culties to languish and decay? must we, in short, who are made in the image of God, endeavour to throw aside that divine similitude, and reduce ourselves to a level with the beasts that perish? God forbid! The God of knowledge doth not command it, the God of wisdom doth not require it of us.

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Whilst Learning hath Modesty for her handmaid, Humility for her companion, and Devotion for her guide, she is amiable, useful, praise-worthy; but when she is vain and self-sufficient, if here, instead of promoting the cause of virtue and religion, she takes up arms against them, while she observes the works of nature, and derides the miracles of God, instead of adoring him for them; then doth she sink even beneath ignorance, and is more hateful and more  
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contemptible, with all her knowledge and wisdom, than barbarity itself.

That knowledge which we should be most solicitous to attain, we are generally most ready to neglect and despise: the knowledge which we ought first to learn, is the last which we acquire, the knowledge of our own poor and imperfect selves. But the man of learning is too proud and self-sufficient, the man of the world is too busy and fordid, the man of pleasure is too idle and voluptuous, ever to make himself master of it; it is a knowledge, indeed, which will require great toil and assiduity in the search, and still greater care and solicitude in the preservation of it.

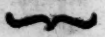
But then it is a treasure which will amply repay our labour; it is an acquisition

tion that will fully recompence all the pains we can endure, and all the difficulties we can encounter in the pursuit of it: it will not, like other knowledge, be found insufficient, perplexing, unimproving, or unsatisfactory; but it will render us wiser and better, and therefore happier, than we were before the possession of it.

Thanks be to God, we have a wisdom which Solomon could not have, and a knowledge which he could not attain unto, the wisdom of salvation by Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of his holy Gospel: to that wisdom and that knowledge therefore let us apply; that knowledge will not make us vain, that wisdom will not make us melancholy: he that hath it will not have grief, and he that increaseth it will not increase sorrow. Let us leave therefore this world, and  
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the knowledge and the wisdom of it, and go in search of the knowledge of God, and the wisdom of salvation: let us put up our prayers to the Almighty, to our great Patron and Benefactor, the inexhaustible fountain of wisdom, that he would enlighten our understandings and improve our faculties; that he will bring us finally to those mansions where we shall know even as we are known, where we shall be wise as he is wise, and pure as he is pure; that he will grant us in this life knowledge of his truth, and in that which is to come life everlasting.

ON  
RETIREMENT.

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# S E R M O N XXXI.

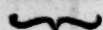
## P S A L M, IV. 4.

*Stand in awe and sin not : commune with  
your own heart, and in your chamber, and  
be still.*

**T**O check the impulse of passion  
and prevent the first attacks of vice  
on the soul of man, a reverential awe of  
the Deity is implanted in every breast by  
the gracious Author of our being. Till  
this faithful guard is removed by vio-  
lence, or seduced and drawn away by  
our deceitful and corrupt affections, guilt  
can by no means gain admittance. Whilst  
the instructions of this useful monitor

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are carefully attended to, the dictates of sin and Satan will not be regarded. The fear of the Lord is the beginning, and it is the continuance also of true wisdom; the moment we part from it, we are in danger of falling into error, and deviating into the paths of vice.

In the earlier part of life therefore we should endeavour to imprint this divine signature on our minds in the most indelible characters, characters which should grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength; such as may never be effaced by time, place or circumstance, and to retain always in our souls, that which will always be their best security.

And to this end the holy Psalmist, who well knew our obligation and necessity of complying with the precept he gives,

gives, hath at the same time that he en-joined, condescended also to guide and direct us in the practice of it; and hath accordingly pointed out to us the most effectual means of preserving that religious awe and veneration of God, which alone can ensure our everlasting salvation. *Commune with your own hearts, says he, and in your chamber, and be still.*

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The royal monitor, who gives us the advice, was well acquainted both with public and private life; he had experienced the danger of courts and palaces, and he hath tasted the sweets of retirement and contemplation: to these last therefore he admonishes us to repair for that peace and tranquillity which it is not in the power of a noisy venal world to bestow; to shun that bustle and glare which is too apt to dazzle and deceive us, and seek the calm and quiet shade of



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life, where we may undisturbed reflect on our duty towards God and man, and promote both our present and future happiness.

We are not at the same time to imagine, that by this retirement is meant an entire separation from our fellow-creatures, a selfish stoical contempt of them, a churlish solitary recess from mankind, and a total abstinence from all the pleasures of social life; for this would be acting in opposition to the first laws of nature, and doubtless displeasing to the Author of it. Unless we might commune with the hearts of others, as well as with our own, we could not partake of the benefits and pleasures of society, and without the converse and communications of society we could be neither wise nor happy.

Nor

Nor does the divine Being require from us an unreasonable sacrifice of the innocent amusements of life; the mind as well as the body must be relaxed, for too intense an application of the one, as well as too great labour and toil imposed on the other, will infeeble, instead of invigorating them. Intervals of refreshment strengthen and improve both, and render them fitter for those offices they were intended to perform. But the danger lies chiefly on the other side: we are all of us ready enough to comply with the follies, to partake of the diversions, and to join in the gaieties of others; but not always do we find it so easy to separate ourselves from them, and return to our chamber to commune with our own hearts.

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The followers of fashion, and the votaries of vice, by a perpetual dissipation

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of thought, by a constant round of vanity, make themselves unfit to move in any other circle; that communion with their own hearts which the royal philosopher recommends, would only present them with a horrid and frightful picture of themselves, which they would gladly avoid. They might perhaps be willing to become what they *ought* to be, but cannot bear first to see what they *are*. They are deeply in debt to themselves, and, (as is generally the case where much is owing) are afraid to look into the account; and to avoid the uneasiness of their creditors solicitations, shun their presence, increase the debt, and plunge themselves still deeper into ruin.

The virtues and vices of a nation are perhaps as changeable as the habits and customs of it: ours, we all know, are as variable as our climate: charity is at present

sent the fashionable virtue, and idleness the prevailing vice ; and a more fatal one, it may be, we could not have fallen into, because it has the specious appearance of innocence to support it. Diversions, it is said, are not inconsistent with religion, nor amusements forbidden by Christianity ; idleness is neither avarice, envy, ambition nor cruelty ; but does it follow from thence that it is not wrong ? If God have a rival in his love, what will it import whether it be an insatiable love of money, or a foolish contempt of it ? If he is to be deserted, will it excuse the base deserter, that he leaves his Creator not for honours, wealth or power, but for an idle amusement, and an inconsiderable trifle ? When men throw away the talent, is it more innocent than if they hid it in a napkin ? and will not the great Steward, with equal justice and
equal

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equal indignation, require it at their hands?

To prevent, therefore, the fatal effects of that epidemical distemper which has of late so spread itself through all ranks and degrees of people, I know no better remedy than that prescribed in the text, to separate ourselves a little from the world, to remove from the scene of vice and folly, and retire in search of true wisdom, the parent of joy and happiness.

When we are in a croud, the variety dazzles our sight, and the quick succession of ideas bewilders the understanding; a certain distance is necessary to give every thing its proper symmetry and proportion: it is only, therefore, when the soul has leisure to reflect, that it can collect its scattered knowledge, and form
fit

fit conclusions. The same habitual acquired courage that animates the soldier in the heat of battle, to rush on danger and death without thought or apprehension, supports also the profligate and licentious man in the pursuit of his pleasures : society quells his fears, flatters his hopes, and encourages his designs. That which he would blush at, would be ashamed or afraid to act alone, a fellow-criminal shall reconcile him to ; for guilt as well as sorrow seems lightened by participation ; and to err with thousands, we unhappily find, is much easier than to stem the torrent of vice and folly, and be singularly right. To remove therefore for a while from the busy scene, to stand aside, to commune with our own hearts, to inquire of them what we have been about ; to call to mind what important duties have been performed, or omitted by us ; to form good resolutions,

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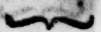
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and plan cautious measures for the future, is a practice highly necessary for us, if we are indeed desirous to do well.

Most of the follies, and most of the misfortunes of life, arise from that pride and presumption which would persuade men that they are superior to them. We should have much more virtue amongst us, if we were not so confident in that little which we possess; those who stand do not take sufficient heed lest they fall. By this retreat from the vanities and impertinencies of the world, we gain a right knowledge of ourselves; an acquaintance indeed we have but too little desire to cultivate! a knowledge we take too little care to improve! yet an acquaintance of all others the most important to us, a knowledge of all others the most beneficial.

Nothing

Nothing perhaps will more strongly recommend to us the retirement and self-examination recommended in the text, than a reflection on the honour and esteem in which it has been held by the best and greatest of men of all ages and nations. All the sons of wisdom and science, the ornaments and glory of human nature, the lawgiver, the moralist, the preacher, and the poet; all those whose labours have instructed and improved mankind, were not the idle votaries of pleasure, the slaves of luxury or ambition, who spent their hours in populous assemblies, amidst corruption, folly, and extravagance; but sober thinking rational beings, who considered that they were not born for themselves alone, but for their friends, their country, and their kind; who separated themselves to intermeddle with wisdom, who retired to their chambers to commune with their
own

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own hearts, to study the works of their Creator, and glorify him; and absented themselves from the world, only to be of the greater use and service to it. In the works of artists, the chief springs which actuate the machine are often so concealed, that the vulgar eye cannot discover whence its movements arise: the sun too, though hidden by intervening clouds, still dispenses his light to enliven, and his heat to invigorate all things; and though not seen, his power is felt, and his influence acknowledged.

The mind of man is ever busy and unsatisfied: it must have food to nourish, and employment to exercise it, be that food ever so unwholesome, that employment ever so trifling and ridiculous. When the gay and dissolute retire from noise and bustle, which from lassitude and satiety they are sometimes forced to do,

do, they feel a horrid vacuity, they feel that there is something wanting within; having no resources there how heavy, how intolerable hangs the weight of time upon their hands! Yet, whilst there is so large a scope for the human mind, so many wonders of God still unexplored, so many arts and sciences still capable of improvement; is it not strange to hear men say their hours hang heavy upon them? What is this, in effect, but to complain of thirst with rivers before them, and starve amidst abundance? How many wretches are there in the world, whose minds are so destitute of knowledge, so barren and uncultivated, as to render them most truly and emphatically miserable! who have no ease or satisfaction but in guilty pleasures, or at best idle impertinent amusements. Why are men thus so unable to converse with others, but because they will not converse

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verse with themselves ? Why are they so deficient in the duties, but because they delight in the impertinencies of life ? because they will not exert those talents which God has intrusted to them ; will not *commune with their own hearts, and in their chambers, and be still.*

To their closets, therefore, let the idle and the ignorant retire ; let them leave the malevolent task of prying into or censuring the hearts of others, and learn to commune with their own ; leave for a while the noise and tumult of a licentious world, and enjoy the new and yet untasted blessings of tranquillity. There let them endeavour to improve their faculties, and better their understanding ; to acquaint themselves with that nature which they partake of, those duties which are required of them, and that faith which they profess.

Further,

Further, If frequent separation from the world is of service to us with regard to all we do here, so is it also productive of those virtues which will insure our eternal happiness hereafter. If men can prevail on themselves to call off their hearts from the fleeting and transitory pleasures of this life, they will naturally fix them where only true joys are to be found. Devotion always separates itself from noise and tumult, the better to perform its offices with that solemnity which they require. Moses and Aaron ascended the high places for this purpose; and our Saviour himself went up into the mountain to pray; from thence he delivered those glorious precepts, that divine morality which so far excelled whatever had before been delivered to mankind, and in comparison of which, all human eloquence is but as a tinkling cymbal.

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If ever there was a time when it was more particularly necessary to retire from noise and bustle, and commune with our own hearts and in our chambers, it is at this, when all the duties of life are so apparently neglected, and the retirement recommended by the holy Psalmist most industriously avoided. No age was perhaps ever so idle and trifling as this we live in; the communication with our own hearts intirely cut off, and all the avenues to knowledge shut up by a croud of empty and frivolous employments: the fashionable world are to be found in every chamber but their own, prefer any noise however dissonant, any hurry however fatiguing, to the disagreeable necessity of being still. We are got, in short, into a foolish and trifling way of spending our few precious hours; let us, I beseech you, get out of it as fast as we can. Let us stand in awe of that Being who

who created us, and not appear before our great master as totally useless and unprofitable servants.

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There are who assert that such as are blest with affluence, have a right to spend their time and fortune as they think proper : a very ridiculous, and a very dangerous assertion ! as if those who are above the necessities, were also above the duties of life ! as if the rich and powerful had a right to monopolize pleasure ; and to be idle and useless were amongst the privileges of the great.

Let us, I intreat you, judge more rationally : let us redeem the time, and commune with our own hearts : let not the force of bad example warp us from our duty, nor fashionable prejudices betray us to our ruin. Surlinefs and contempt of the world, is not goodness or religion ;

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religion; and on the other hand, a servile compliance with its follies is unwise and unmanly. Good-breeding was meant to assist and set off the charms of virtue, but not to rival or supplant her: and such as make politeness alone the rule of their actions, are like those architects who to ornaments and delicacy, sacrifice the strength and usefulness of their buildings.

Let us then retire to our chambers, and commune with our own hearts; those companions we ought to be so intimately acquainted with, and which yet, too many of us are utter strangers to: we may find them indeed like other acquaintance, deceitful; but it will be some profit, some advantage to us to know that they are so; to know how far we may confide in them, to discover their weaknesses, to see their imperfections, and to
mark

mark their bent and inclinations, their various shifts and windings, that we may be upon our guard, and prepared against those passions which so easily beset us. Let us not (as too many do) commune so long with the world, that we are both unable and unwilling to commune with ourselves; busy ourselves so perpetually in the chambers of riot and debauchery, that we are afraid and ashamed to enter into our own; so engage ourselves in the noise and folly of a tumultuous world, as to put it out of our power to be still, or ever to enjoy that peace and quiet which only the frequent communication with our own hearts can procure, and which retirement and innocence alone can bestow.

Permit me to hope that what I have advanced may have some influence over our future conduct; that we shall immediately

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diately retire to our chambers, and commune with our own hearts. Certain it is, that when the mind is fraught with knowledge, she needs not external objects to furnish out the noblest entertainment; and if she is barren and unfruitful, retirement is the fittest soil for culture and improvement. If our hearts should there reproach us for past follies, their admonitions may be highly useful; if, on the other hand, they should approve and applaud our conduct, their converse will be most delightful to us. Let us, then, not be unwilling or afraid to be alone: there is a Being who will be ever with us: if in our retirement we address ourselves to him, he will hear and he will answer us; he will dispel the fears of the diffident, awaken the attention of the careless, employ the idle, and repress the licentious mind: he will call off our thoughts from the dissipation of public,

public, to the duties of private life ; prepare our hearts for the contemplation of nobler objects, and fit us for the converse of more perfect beings than those whom we now associate with : and when our minds are exalted and capable of tasting spiritual joys, will convey us to them, even to his own heaven, the state of blessed spirits, the region of never-fading joy, peace, and immortality.

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pare our hearts for the contemplation of
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of blessed spirits, the region of never-
fading joy, peace, and immortality.

SERMON XXXII

ON

A N G E L S.

AMONGST of those persons
and of that order which are
created and constituted by God
for the service of man, and for the
benefit of the world, there is one
kind of angels, who are called
good angels, and who are
appointed to attend upon the
souls of the righteous, and to
conduct them to heaven.

ON

A. N. C. E. L. S.

S E R M O N XXXII.

H E B R E W S I. 14.

*Are they not all ministring spirits, sent
forth to minister for them who shall
be heirs of salvation?*

AMONGST all those ridiculous
and absurd prejudices which arise
from a narrow and confined way of think-
ing, there is not perhaps any one more
capable of obstructing the human mind
in its search after truth, than the vast
opinion we are so apt to entertain of our
own nature, its dignity, consequence,
and importance.

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Children

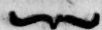
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Children placed on the summit of a little hill, who see nothing but clouds above them, fancy the spot they stand upon must be the highest in the whole world, though it may at the same time, in spite of that casual eminence, be one of the lowest places in it. Just in the same manner, and with as little reason, do men suppose this earth which they inhabit to be the center of the universe : that all things else were made but in subserviency to, and for the use of *them* ; and that they are withal the only rational and immortal beings, the only beings capable of serving God, or who can possibly deserve his favour or protection.

Natural philosophy, (a noble and useful study, and of late much cultivated and improved amongst us) will inform us, that there is an universal order and gradation through the whose visible world,
from

from man to the lowest of beings. If our pride therefore will permit us, why may we not suppose this chain extended upwards also from man to God. The infinite distance between divine and human knowledge will afford room sufficient for our ideas, and on this supposition, very probable will it appear, that the highest order of celestial spirits are as superior to us, as we are to the lowest class of animal beings.

From the above-mentioned consideration, therefore, even though holy writ had been silent in this point, we have reason sufficient to suppose that there are spirits whose nature is much more perfect, whose powers and faculties are far more extensive than our own: but to put the matter beyond all doubt, and more effectually to check the pride and presumption of man, God hath thought fit
by

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by his sacred oracles to make frequent mention of the holy angels, those ministring spirits who, as the apostle says, *minister for them which shall be heirs of salvation*. I have the more willingly selected this subject at this time, because a set of modern enthusiasts have lately sprung up, who, amongst many other things equally absurd, have endeavoured to contradict the received opinion concerning these ministring spirits, and by forced interpretations of scripture peculiar to themselves, have denied the existence of angels, and explained away their very being.

I shall endeavour therefore, in the subsequent discourse,

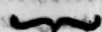
First, To explain, as far as the subject will permit and scripture confirm to us, the nature and employment of these glorious beings: And,

Secondly,

Secondly, Briefly consider of what service the knowledge of that nature and those offices may be to us, in regard to our life and manners.

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And First, In regard to their nature, it must be confessed we have but a very faint and glimmering light to guide us in our enquiries concerning it; nor indeed can this ignorance be matter of astonishment to us, when we reflect, that even the narrow limits of our own understanding, the knowledge of our own weak capacities, is a secret even to the wisest, and often by those few who are most capable of attaining to it, very slightly regarded, and very carelessly pursued. If then what is so immediately before our eyes, and of the utmost importance to us, escape our observations; if we are so ignorant of our own less perfect nature,
how

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how much more so must we be of that which is so far superior to it.

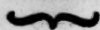
All that we can certainly know of these exalted spirits, or which may be gathered from scripture concerning them, is, that they are immaterial and intelligent, but created and dependent beings, created long before man. The cherubims, angels in all probability of the highest rank, being placed at the Garden of Eden immediately after the Fall: they are constantly represented as possessed of more knowledge and power than men, as disencumbered by gross corporeal forms, able to transport themselves unperceived by us throughout this lower world: described frequently in holy scripture as acquainted with the thoughts, able to encourage or turn aside the purposes of men, strangers to all the passions and appetites, diseases or misfortunes incident to

to mortality : *they that wait upon the Lord,*
(to speak in the sublime language of the
prophet) *mount up as eagles, they run*
and are not weary, their understanding
abounds like Euphrates, and like Jordan
in the time of harvest ; they are covered
with light as with a garment, and cloathed
with majesty and Honour ; they have, in
short, knowledge without pride, enjoy-
ment without satiety, and power with-
out decay,

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Endowed with such natures, and blest
with such perfections, we can no longer
wonder to see them admitted to the mi-
nistry of God, and engaged in the im-
mediate service of the most High ; to
see them ascending and descending, and
performing the various offices assigned
them by their great Creator.

Whilst God did himself graciously
condescend to rule his chosen people, he

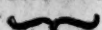
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frequently made use of the ministry of angels in the dispensations of his Providence towards them. Sometimes we see them employed in the preservation of whole states and kingdoms, and at others watching over and protecting some favourite individual. When Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, he ordered them to inform him that the Israelites were brought out of Egypt by an angel. *When we cried unto the Lord,* says he, (Num. xx. 16.) *he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and brought us forth out of Egypt.* And again, Isaiah says, *the angel of his presence saved them.*

In the 16th chapter of Genesis we see an angel exercising the noble virtue of humanity in the highest degree towards an object most deserving of it. The unhappy Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, by her mistress's permission had been admitted,

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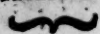
as the scripture phrases it, to the bosom of her master Abraham; but becoming soon after, on that very account, the object of her jealousy and hatred, was greatly persecuted and oppressed by her, inso-much, that in order to avoid further insults, poor and defenceless as she was, she had fled into the desert, where, in all probability, she would soon have ended her days and miseries together, had not the Lord, in compassion to her, sent his minister to comfort and relieve her. The angel of the Lord came and found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, gave her hopes of happiness, and advised her to return; to which she readily assented: but a little while after we again see this unfortunate woman in almost the same distressful circumstances, turned out of doors, and forced to wander with her helpless infant into the wilderness of Beersheba, given up a prey to me-

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lancholy and despair ; when the angel of God calls to and comforts her, supplies them both with food and water, and, in short, supported and maintained them, so that the child grew, and became an archer, and dwelt in the wilderness of Paran.

Are they not all ministering spirits, says the apostle, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? that is, to them who in the general tenor of their lives have endeavoured to please and serve God. Such, and such only, will his Holy Spirit guide, and his holy angels defend ; to such they are always present, about their path, and about their bed, and spying out all their ways. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him :—the pious, the beneficent, and the distressed, were always the objects of their care : the patriarchs and prophets

prophets in the Old Testament, the apostles and good men celebrated in the New. Balaam, Jacob, Abraham and Joshua; to all these they appeared and were of signal service: to Peter, to Philip, and to Cornelius; all men of distinguished piety and goodness. To these heirs of salvation they will ever be present, ever ready to serve, to cherish and to protect them. It cannot, indeed, without the utmost folly and presumption, be supposed that these glorious beings, the friends of God, will aid and assist his enemies; that such faithful servants will visit and preserve those who despise and vilify their Master; or that God, indeed, would ever employ his beloved ministers in a task so hateful to them, and withal so fruitless and unnecessary: for if they will not believe Moses and the prophets, if they will not be convinced by all those glaring truths which both reason and revelation con-

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stantly suggest, so neither will they be persuaded though an angel came down from heaven to satisfy and to reclaim them. To such indeed they will be sent, though not as blessings, but as scourges; for holy scripture hath informed us, that as these exalted beings were employed to save and defend the sons of God, so were they also frequently made use of, as instruments of the divine vengeance. *Behold*, says the Lord, (Exod. xxiii.) *I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way: beware of him, and obey his voice; provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.*

The same angels who came to save Lot from destruction, punished the Sodomites with blindness. God, we are told in the book of Chronicles, sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem, as it is witnessed also by the prophet Isaiah. By
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an angel a hundred eighty and five thousand were slain in the camp of the Assyrians. *It is enough, saith the Lord, stay thine hand: and the Lord commanded the angel, and he put up his sword.* By an angel, the proud, self-sufficient, and cruel Herod was smitten, because he arrogated to himself that glory which was due to the Supreme Being; *and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

These and many other instances of the power of angels we meet with in holy scripture. But it is particularly worthy our observation to remark, with what and more than ordinary zeal, readiness, and alacrity, these blessed spirits exerted themselves in the great work of our redemption by Jesus Christ. A more excellent, and at the same time a more delightful employment such beings could not indeed have been engaged in. To

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assist in saving a sinking world from ruin, a sinful and corrupt world from everlasting misery and destruction, was a task worthy the noblest natures: and accordingly we find them in various scenes of this important transaction.

Gabriel is sent to Zacharias to shew him glad tidings: to foretel the birth of John, who was to prepare the way before the Saviour of mankind, and *turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*. Again, we see this beloved minister appearing to the blessed virgin, and prophesying the birth of the Messiah. A little after the nativity, the angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds, and with him a multitude of the heavenly host, singing and praising God. David's prophecy of Christ was literally fulfilled, where he says, *he shall give his angels charge over thee: they shall bear thee up in their hands,*

bands, lest thou hit thy foot against a stone.

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And accordingly, in the life of Christ, as related by the holy apostles, we see angels frequently intervening to save, to defend, to comfort, and to relieve him. After the temptation in the wilderness, *angels, says St. Matthew, came and ministered unto him.* And when he retired to the Mount of Olives, his usual place of devotion, *there appeared, says St. Luke, xxii. 43, an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.* Doubtless they were all ambitious of serving him, would he have accepted of their assistance: and this he himself intimates, when, after rebuking his friend, who had drawn his sword in his defence, he says, *thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels.* Again, that care of and respect for their divine Master, which, whilst living, they were permitted to shew to him, they also persevered

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severed in after his death ; two angels were seen by Mary, as she looked into the sepulchre, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

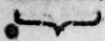
From this time we see them on various occasions promoting the great cause of Christ and his religion, by assisting his saints and followers. Since the times of the apostles, we have not indeed any sufficient evidence of their visibly appearing to men ; but still it is extremely probable, that they conduct and preside over our actions, that they co-operate with the divine grace, and are of the utmost service to us.

If angels therefore are ever present with us, ought we not to shew such a respect to these noble guests, as never to mix with them any meaner, baser society ?

ciety? should we not watch carefully all our words and actions, when we reflect that every word is heard, and every action seen by *them*: it is a respect we always pay to our superiors *here*: how much more due to these immortal visitants from above?

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If angels are continually employed, as scripture hath assured us, in serving God, let us imitate them, if *they* spend their hours in praying to and worshipping him, let us join with them in the chorus of praise and thanksgiving. Great and glorious are the privileges which these blessed spirits enjoy, yet are they such privileges as we ourselves need not despair of one day attaining to: God has made us, as the Psalmist expresses it, little lower than the angels, and will crown us with glory and worship; though in this world we cannot be equal, yet in
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the next may we be no ways inferior to them in power, in knowledge, or in happiness.

We see that these spirits were always ready to assist the afflicted, to soften the calamities, and encrease the comforts of life : that they condescended to visit even those of the lowest order amongst men : let us then join with them in this labour of love, behave with tenderness and beneficence to our fellow-creatures, and think none of them beneath our notice and assistance : so shall we ourselves become as it were guardian-angels, and rival these exalted beings in the noblest of their perfections.

Briefly then, As it doth sufficiently appear from what has been said, that we have reason to imagine the blessed angels of God, these exalted beings do still,
though

though invisibly, minister unto men, that they still guard and protect the heirs of salvation, that is, such as deserve their favour and attention: it highly becomes us to be thankful unto God for this most gracious condescension, when we consider the thousand temptations to which we are subject, the thousand dangers we are liable to, and the slippery paths we tread in: when we consider that, as the son of Sirach nobly expresses it, we go in this life in the midst of snares, and walk on the battlements of the city, it must be a glorious reflection to think that we have such guides to conduct, such counsellors to admonish us, that the friends of God are our friends, and that his servants minister unto us.

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Having thus endeavoured to explain, as far as in this imperfect state we possibly can, the nature of these ministering spirits,

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spirits, it may not be amiss, before I conclude, as I proposed,

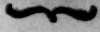
Secondly, To consider of what service the knowledge of this nature may be to us, with regard to our own lives and manners.

And to suppose that these glorious beings are employed in the guardianship and protection of mankind, may tend to give us a more true and adequate idea of our own nature, may humble our pride by the consideration of their superior perfections, and at the same time raise our hopes to an emulation of them.

Though we do not therefore with the church of Rome pay that worship and adoration to *them* which are due only to their *Creator*, yet may we shew a proper deference and submission to their more
extensive

extensive faculties, and enlightened understandings.

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Lastly, we are assured that the joy of these immortal beings, their pleasure and happiness, is in giving glory to God, in hymning his praises, recording his mercies, and celebrating his perfections; can there be a more pleasing, a more delightful employment? why then should we not join them in it? Let us all then, with one accord, join to bless and praise God for the creation of these immortal ministers of good; together with those spirits, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, let us laud and magnify his holy name, evermore praising him and saying, holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts: heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most high.

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ASTOR LENOX TILDEN FOUNDATION

S E R M O N XXXIII.

MATTHEW XIX. 24.

*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye
of a needle, than for a rich man to enter
into the kingdom of God.*

OUR blessed Saviour, who at all
times and in all places endeavour-
ed to convince mankind that his kingdom
was not of this world, and to set them
right in their mistaken notions of hap-
piness, in the verses just preceding my
text, had commanded the young man
who required of him the means of eter-
nal life, to leave all his treasures and
follow him: *but when he heard that say-*

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ing (says the apostle) he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions: whereupon Jesus immediately makes the following reflection, naturally resulting from the event: Verily I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Some learned commentators on this passage have affected to give a different interpretation of it, and having discovered that the word in the original, which is here construed camel, will admit also of another signification, have changed the image, and supposed that our Saviour said, *it is easier for a cable to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

The propriety of the metaphor they contend is here better preserved, the sense
equally

equally clear, and the moral equally persuasive.

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But it may be said in favour of the received version, that our Saviour here addresses himself to the Jews, and makes use of the oriental manner : in proof of which it may be observed, that this very sentence is to be met with in the Koran of Mahomet ; and has been a common proverbial expression among the eastern nations, and is used as such even unto this day. This however must, after all, be no more than a matter of mere curiosity, as the inference from the passage in either sense must be the same ; namely, the improbability of the rich man's entering into a state of future happiness : *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* An expression, no doubt, very strong and poignant, but which is

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by no means to be understood in the strict and literal sense, as if the good things of this world should totally exclude us from the hopes of a better in another, or that we could not be happy here, without forfeiting all our claims to the blessings of an hereafter. The sole meaning, scope, and intention of it was, to warn mankind against the great and imminent dangers arising to them from that affluence and prosperity which they seemed so warmly to desire, and so eagerly to pursue.

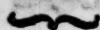
We may rest assured therefore, that what is here asserted is a truth, because it came from him who could have no interest to deceive us: and it is no less evident that he thought it also a truth worthy of our consideration, or he would not certainly have proposed it to us. It will well become us, therefore, to weigh and consider

consider within ourselves the reasons which induced our blessed Saviour to pass so severe a sentence on this great idol of mankind, that we may be the better enabled to avoid that which will obstruct our entrance into the kingdom of God, and at the same time turn our steps into that path which will most probably conduct us to it. To this end therefore it may not be improper to observe, among the reasons which induced our Saviour to make the assertion now before us, the following might probably be the most powerful and convincing; namely, that riches do naturally and of necessity contribute to render men proud, idle, voluptuous, covetous, and irreligious; and as the gates of heaven were always shut against such, it is impossible that the rich can ever enter into them.

Let us then first examine, if it need an examination, whether the rich are

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proud.

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proud. Surely we may venture to pronounce that man little skilled in the genealogy of vice, who doth not know that affluence is the parent of oppression, and pride the daughter of prosperity. When men are raised to a certain rank or degree of life, they are generally inclined to look upon their inferiors with contempt, and on their fellow-creatures with insensibility. One would indeed imagine, from the high looks of the proud, that they considered the rest of mankind as a species of beings infinitely beneath them, of powers and capacities by no means on a level with their own; that they had therefore an indisputable right to treat them accordingly. One would suppose that the faculties and abilities of the great extended with their fortunes; that beauty, stature, wit, and wisdom, all the perfections, in short, of mind and body, never failed to increase in proportion to their abundance. It
must

must at the same time be acknowledged, in extenuation of their insolence, that the opinion which the rich man entertains of himself receives no small encouragement from a venal fawning world, who have meanness enough to stoop to the burthen, whilst they lament the weight of it. It is not that men judge partially of themselves, but that others also are apt to weigh them in this false scale, and compliment them on this merely ideal superiority.

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Past dispute it is, that pride is the natural attendant on riches; and it is equally indisputable that nothing can so effectually exclude us from the kingdom of God, as our frequent indulgence in it. *He that exalteth himself, we are expressly told, shall be abased, and he only who humbleth himself shall be exalted.* Pride, we know, was the peculiar sin of satan, and,

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and all that rebellious crew who were the partakers of his crime, and of his punishment also: and it is highly probable that the same vice which expelled angels out of heaven, should prevent men from entering into it.

But Secondly, That riches tend in a great measure to render man not only proud, but idle and dissolute also, is a point too self-evident to admit of any doubt or dispute concerning it, as we need but open our eyes to receive immediate conviction. Look round among those whom we falsely term the great, among those whom riches and honours have raised to a superior rank, how do they for the most part repay the benefits which they have received? how are their hours employed? what traces do they leave behind of their existence? do they contemplate the book of knowledge, open the volume of wisdom or tread in the paths

paths of virtue? do we find them strenuous assertors in the cause of truth, exerting their influence in favour of the good, relieving the distressed, or administering to the necessities of their fellow-creatures? Is the kingdom of God, or God himself, in all or in any of their thoughts? do they spend that leisure, and improve those faculties which God has given them, in the investigation of his works, in the study of his word, and the obedience to his laws.

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On the other hand, do we not see them engaged in one continued round of idle frivolous employments? their industry, if they have any, lavished away on trifles, and all their irreparable hours lost in flattering those they hate, censuring those they are obliged to, and associating with those whom they despise? and whence arise these foolish connections? this profusion

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fusion of all that is precious and valuable, but from the superabundance of the good things of life, which makes them wanton, and careless of every thing about them?

But riches not only cause us to throw away our time on those things which can be of no benefit or advantage to us, but also on those which are most fatal and pernicious; they not only make us idle, but luxurious also; they give us opportunities of gratifying all those passions which we ought to repress, and indulging every appetite which it is our duty to restrain. There are thousands in the world, who would have been innocent if they had not been rich, and who perhaps would never have been guilty, if they had not been great.

If we are the votaries of pleasure, affluence is the handmaid who is always
ready

ready to introduce us to her; to trick her out in the fairest attire, to heighten all her charms, and increase her allurements. There is indeed scarce any other way to the temple of Vice, but through the gates of Prosperity. The Tyrant Luxury, is a monarch which, like other potentates, will not be seen by the vulgar, and smiles only on the rich and powerful: admission to her presence must be purchased, and that gold which buys every thing can always procure it. Fortune, like another satan, carries us to an eminence, shews us all the kingdoms of the world, and promises them too, if we will fall down and worship her. She can transform herself, as it were by enchantment, into every shape, and by a kind of magic power become in an instant every thing we can wish or desire. When she thus presents to us all her costly viands, and provokes our appetite,

how

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how shall we refrain from sitting down to the banquet ? when the poisonous bowl is held as it were to our lips, and the liquor but too palatable, would it not be strange if we should refuse the draught ? David was very probably a more happy, doubtless a more innocent being, when he fed his father's sheep, than when he sat on the throne of Israel : and if Solomon had not been corrupted by the allurements and pleasures of a crown, he would not perhaps have wandered after idols, and forsaken the living God. Is it probable then that the rich man should ever enter into the kingdom of God ? that he who is thus revelling in the gardens of pleasure, should ever quit that delightful mansion for the thorny and perplexing paths of religion and virtue ? Instead of seeking the kingdom of God, he is hastening to the regions of satan ; instead of approaching to
this

this country, his road is directly contrary ; and every step which he takes but leads him the further from it. Have we not reason then to acquiesce with our blessed Redeemer, and to cry out with him, *that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

But if the disease of fullness and prosperity doth not break out and discharge itself in the heats and tumults of luxury and debauchery, it may rage inwardly with equal danger, and bring on the burning fever of avarice.

Avarice is a monster, whose appetite increases as it is fed ; and the more it devours, grows but the more voracious. In other pleasures which draw aside the mind of man, the enjoyment of the object puts an end to the desire of it, and
fruition

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fruition is quickly followed by satiety : but the covetous man is always in pursuit of that which is always at a distance from him. Covetousness is therefore in scripture most properly and most emphatically stiled idolatry ; and it would be real matter of astonishment, if he should worship the true God, who hath already set up a false one, to whom he pays all his duty and all his adoration. The kingdom of God is indeed a kingdom which the covetous man doth as little desire as deserve : as he is capable of no joy but that which arises from his darling treasure, what pleasure could he propose to himself in a place whither he is sure it cannot possibly follow him? But were he ever so willing, it is not probable he should be able to enter into it.

Unfortunately for the covetous man,
all those qualities and perfections which
alone

alone can gain him admittance, are the very things which he is the greatest stranger to; all that could ensure his welcome is utterly foreign to his nature and disposition: before he can enter into the kingdom of God, he must acquire that for which he has no inclination, and part with that for which he has the greatest love, and the greatest affection?

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But Thirdly and Lastly, Riches contribute to render men irreligious. For the truth of this, I would appeal to every day's and every hour's experience. What are the great and powerful? how do they act, speak, and live? without virtue, without religion, without God, denying that very power which is exerted in their favour, taking up arms against the Sovereign who protects them, the Being who presides over, the Providence that feeds and caresses them: even whilst they are

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enjoying the blessings, and tasting the goodness of their gracious Benefactor, ungratefully refusing their acknowledgements of it; like the children of Israel, whilst he raineth down manna upon them, whilst the bread is yet in their mouths rebelling against him, and whilst they are every minute happy in his bounties, and rejoicing in his indulgence, at the same time despise his omnipotence, transgress his laws, and trample on his commandments,

If then it is granted, and granted it must inevitably be, that riches make us proud, idle, luxurious, covetous, and irreligious, the only question that remains, is, whether, whilst we are so, we can possibly enter into the kingdom of God? Can the proud enter into it, when it is expressly declared, that he is an abomination to the Lord; that unless we
are

are humble, patient, and devout, we can never see the divine Being? Can he that is idle, flatter himself with the delusive hopes of ever arriving at this delightful mansion, who will not set a foot forward towards it, when we are assured, that it is not reserved for the slothful and indolent, but for those only who work out their own salvation? Can the voluptuous and luxurious man, who is perpetually wallowing in his own pleasures, and defiling his body in scenes of riot and debauchery, think of daring to appear in the presence of that God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*? Can the covetous man, whose views are all centered in himself, and who thinks of nothing but this world, look forward to another? Is it not written, that he cannot serve, and consequently cannot be entitled to any reward, both from God and Mammon? Lastly, can the irreligious,

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gious, the atheist, and the scorner, hope the favour and protection of God, whilst he doubts his power, and denies his existence? Can he have any claim or title to the *joys* of a future state, who does not believe that there *is* any? Or, is it probable, that whilst the infidel is trying to subvert the kingdom of God, he should ever be admitted *into* it? What then, after all, is this darling object of our wishes and desires, thus universally beloved and fought after? Does it bestow pleasures adequate to the toil and labour of the acquisition? suitable to the dignity of our nature, and productive of solid and lasting happiness? Does it not, as is evident from what we have advanced, on the other hand, often destroy our peace here, and still more often endanger our eternal rest and felicity hereafter? What has the rich man to do therefore in this perilous situation? Is there

a ne-

a necessity that he throw all his treasures into the ocean, to lighten the vessel, and preserve himself from the storm? Or doth Christ require of us, as he did of the young man in the Gospel, to leave all before we can pretend to follow him? *Who then, as the disciples said, can be saved? But with God, as Christ himself assured us, all things are possible: it is possible even for the rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

The journey indeed requires strength, toil, and resolution; but the path is visibly enough pointed out to us. From the most poisonous herbs may sometimes be extracted the most salutary medicines; and, in the same manner, from that affluence, which gives growth to so many dangerous and destructive passions, a plentiful harvest of virtues may spring up and flourish: if we can root up the

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weeds of pride, avarice, luxury, and idleness, and plant in their room the seeds of humility, sobriety, gratitude, benevolence, and charity, we may be happy here, and at the same time procure to ourselves the promise of being much more so hereafter.

The rich might enter into the kingdom of heaven, if they would be humble, meek, and lowly: if they would consider the affluence that is bestowed on them, not as rewards of their merit, but trials of their virtue; that the larger the talent which is intrusted to them, the more care and assiduity is required on their part, to make a proper use of it; and that the higher they are raised above their fellow-creatures, the more necessary, and at the same time the more amiable, would be their condescension towards them.

2dly,

2dly, The rich might enter into the kingdom of heaven, if they would always be grateful and pious to their divine Benefactor ; if they would seriously and frequently reflect on his unbounded undeserved goodness towards them ; if they would consider how graciously God hath dealt with them, and how deeply they are indebted to him.

3dly, and lastly, The rich would be always benevolent and charitable, if they were sufficiently sensible of God's bounty and benevolence to them ; they would be charitable even for their own sakes, if they knew the pleasures which the good mind feels in bestowing, and acknowledge that *it is far more blessed to give than to receive.*

By these means, and by these alone, may the rich man avoid the hard sentence

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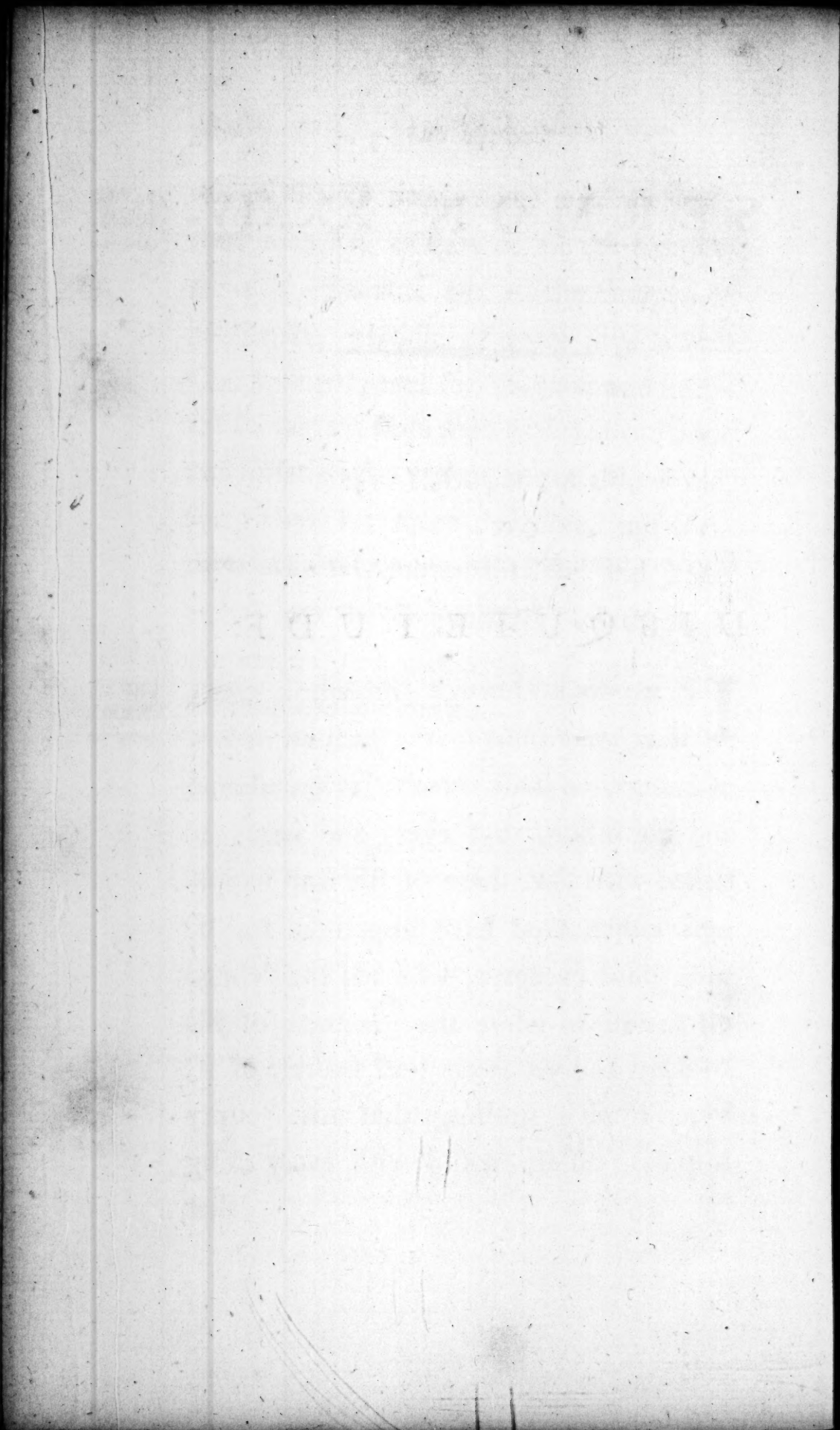
which

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which Christ pronounced against him: thus may he, in spite of all the temptations of affluence, and all the dangers of prosperity, partake of those joys which God hath prepared for his good and faithful servants: thus may he leave the poor and unsatisfactory pleasures of this world, for riches far more desirable, and treasures infinitely more valuable, and enter at last into the kingdom of God, through the merits and mediation of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer.

ON

DISQUIETUDE.



S E R M O N X X X I V .

P S A L M, XLII. 14.

*Why art thou so vexed, O my soul, and why
art thou so disquieted within me?*

IF we look through the whole creation, and observe the various orders of beings, we shall perceive, to our shame and confusion, that every one seems satisfied with that share of life and happiness which God hath appointed for it, man alone excepted, who has the strongest reason to adore the goodness of his Maker, and yet seems least sensible of it. Pleased with nothing that his bounty imparts, unless blessed with every thing
that

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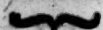
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that his power can bestow ; oppressed beyond measure with real, and even sinking under imaginary misfortunes ; repining at the decrees of Providence, and refusing to enjoy what he has, through a ridiculous and perpetual desire of what he has not. And yet, as much as the discontented and ungrateful man complains of the ills of life ; great and repeated are the favours, many and solid the blessings, which God, of his infinite goodness and mercy, every day and every hour, pours down upon us.

Man, as the Psalmist says, nevertheless walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain. Amidst all the blessings of this life, he is still unhappy. Now and then indeed he is forced, as it were in spite of himself, to lose sight of this dreary prospect, to turn his thoughts inward, and reflect on his condition, to
acknow-

acknowledge the goodness of God towards him, to reproach his own heart for his unjust complaints, and to cry out with David, *Why art thou so vexed, O my soul!* The goodness of God doth so graciously provide for our necessities, prevent our wants, and turn aside our calamities, that we must be obliged, in spite of all our casual afflictions, to acknowledge with the Psalmist, that the question in the text is not easy to be resolved, *Why art thou so vexed, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?*

A thousand unthanked for blessings, a thousand undeserved favours, are conferred on us: where one sense is defective, another is more excellent; where one blessing is withheld from us, it is generally supplied by another no less desirable. Our lives indeed are not to be passed over without ever tasting the cup of sorrow;
but

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but then God of his mercy hath ordained that those afflictions which are exceeding sharp, those pains that are unto *death*, are seldom lasting ; and such as are of longer duration, admit of frequent pauses and intermissions. We have, in short, the greatest reason to be thankful to our Creator that we are not more miserable, when we reflect how much we deserve to be so. But that both the folly and guilt of perpetual disquietude may appear the more evident to us, I shall endeavour, in the following discourse,

First, To point out to you some of the various causes of this universal discontent and disquietude amongst men.
And,

Secondly, Lay before you the most probable means of effectually removing them.

And

And First, then, We shall not so much wonder at the disquietude of mankind, if we seriously reflect on the natural and genuine causes of it.

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Men, it hath been frequently observed, are very ingenious in tormenting one another, and they are perhaps no less so in finding out methods to torment themselves. Human nature hath indeed subjected us to some distresses, and we have created as many more. Where the constitution will not admit of disorders, fancy, in weak minds, is ever ready to supply them: where fortune hath provided against natural wants, humour and caprice will find out artificial ones; inso-much, that the whimsical and absurd suffer perhaps more from the absence of what they do *not* stand in need of, than of what they do.

One

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One would not imagine that the pleasures of human life were so numerous, that the branches of joy were so luxuriant, as to require the toil of man to prune and lop them ; and yet certain it is, that half of them are not enjoyed. The seeds of happiness are sown by nature with a liberal and a bounteous hand ; but they demand some care in the cultivation ; and it is to our industry alone we must be indebted for the abundance of the harvest.

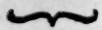
For, First, Hopes too sanguine, and desires too eager, for the most part begin with doubt and uneasiness, and end in disappointment and despair. We build a fabrick in the air, without any materials but those which our own imagination affords us, and then wonder at the dissolution of it. Men are too apt to fix their hearts and affections on some particular object, and then the whole world
without

without it will not please or satisfy them. Nothing is enough for the discontented man, nothing will please the fretful and repining one. We shut our eyes against the beauties of the creation, and then find fault with the dreariness of the prospect.

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We taste but very few of the dainties which are set before us, and then most bitterly and most ungratefully complain against the Master of the banquet. When the blood is vitiated, the juices soured and corrupted, no food, though ever so wholesome, will nourish or sustain the body; and in the same manner, when the mind hath contracted a peevish and fretful disposition, nothing can administer joy or satisfaction to it. The ambitious man, instead of returning thanks to God for the riches which he has bestowed on him, is continually soliciting him for

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power ; for that very power, which the miser, on the other hand, would most gladly exchange for the affluence of his discontented neighbour.

But not from our ill-placed or immoderate desires alone proceeds our continual discontent and disquietude ; our fears, as well as our hopes, do often most cruelly deceive and betray us. The apprehensions of evil are for the most part worse than the evil itself. Our fruitful imagination is ever teeming with monsters, and we terrify ourselves with phantoms of our own raising ; magnify every horrid and frightful object by a false glass, and then are surprised and astonished at the bigness of it. How many are there in the world, who enjoy no happiness in being what they *are*, from the foolish and ill-grounded apprehensions of what they *may* be ; who feel the

pangs

pangs of poverty and affliction even in the bosom of plenty and prosperity? It is no wonder therefore that they are unhappy who resolve to be so: it would be strange indeed if those whose eyes are fixed on distant objects, should behold the treasures which lie at their feet.

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But besides that disquietude which arises either from the sanguine and exalted hopes of real good, or the ill-grounded fears of imaginary evil, there is also another species of enmity which arises from the worst of human passions, and is the child of envy. When our uneasiness flows, *not* from what we ourselves *want*, but from the abundance of that which *another* is in possession of.

The envious man is never rich whilst there is a richer, never great while there is a greater, never happy whilst there is,

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or whilst he thinks there is a happier
than himself.

Haman we know was miserable in the midst of all his honours, whilst he saw Mordecai the Jew sitting at the gate : and the Prodigal's brother did not reap any joy or satisfaction from the love and tenderness of his father, when he saw the fatted calf killed for one whom he thought far less deserving of it than himself. The best-grounded and most reasonable disquietude, which can arise in the mind of man, is doubtless that which springs from the commission of sin. Misery is the natural offspring of sin, and disquietude the constant companion of guilt.

Now though a proper sense of, and sorrow for our own unworthiness, are certainly very acceptable to God ; tho' a broken and contrite heart is a sacrifice

crifice which he will not despise ; yet even this disquietude is capable (like every other good thing) of becoming evil by excess, and of producing very fatal and destructive consequences. There have been too many instances of men whom this kind of disquietude hath driven to a fixed religious melancholy, and even sometimes to the utmost horrors of despair : and this no doubt must be the sharpest and most piercing affliction that can possibly depress the human soul : the eternal wrath of the living God who may abide, a wounded spirit who can bear ?

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Would one think there were beings (and yet there are such) whose constant employment it is to reduce their fellow-creatures to this miserable condition, who are perpetually affrighting them with threats of divine vengeance, breathing forth the flames of hell, and anticipating

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the torments of it, denouncing everlasting punishment, and excluding the unhappy sinner from all hopes of salvation.

But who is it that shall dare to confine the goodness of God, or prescribe bounds to the mercy of the Almighty? Who shall dare to say unto his brother that the Creator will never have pity on the creature, or that he who made will not redeem us also? But can we go down so deep into the pit of destruction that his arm cannot extend to reach us out of it?

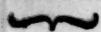
We have seen then what are the most general and natural causes of that universal discontent and disquietude which destroys the peace and happiness of mankind: let us now turn our eyes towards the melancholy and destructive consequences perpetually arising from it; let us consider that it renders us absolutely
unfit

unfit for every religious, every moral,
and every social duty.

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Acts of public or of private devotion can never be performed as they ought, unless the mind is free from care and disquietude, cleansed from all the pollution of worldly objects, and fitted for the seriousness and solemnity of the occasion. When we wait as it were at the throne of God, and address ourselves to the Supreme Being, we should not suffer any of the violent and tumultuous passions to disturb us in that sacred employment. When the soul is vexed, it knows not how to form itself to prayer; and when it is disquieted, it is still less inclined to thanksgiving.

And as disquietude and uneasiness incapacitate us for a communication with the Deity, so does it render us hateful

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and disagreeable to one another: as it hinders us from performing our duty towards God, so does it also from doing our duty towards man. Those who carry with them a restless, fretful, and peevish disposition, are for the most part useless, always gloomy and unpleasing members of society. Cheerfulness and complacency are indispensibly necessary to form the amiable companion, or the kind and generous friend. When the turbulent and unruly passions are softened into peace, and the mind harmonised by felicity, it is then, and then only, it can diffuse itself in acts of love, charity, and beneficence: and whilst a man is not agreeable to himself, he can never be so to any body else.

Secondly, Where then shall we discover a grand specific for this epidemic distemper, where shall we find an antidote against

against this destructive poison? *Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there?*

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Yes there is. Let us hear what reason and religion, the great physicians of mankind, will prescribe unto us.—Go, say they both, and get thee the universal medicine, get thee the balm of innocence, to heal thine infirmities. By this only the health of the soul can be preserved, by this only it can be restored. If thou art heavy laden, this will refresh thee; if thou art sick with sorrows, this will heal them. Whilst we are in the temple of virtue, we are safe; it is a sacred asylum; and care and disquietude will not dare to enter into and profane it. He who hath her, will enjoy lasting peace and tranquillity; and he who is armed with her, need not fear what man can do unto him: he rises superior to fortune, and looks down on the vicissitudes of life with an eye of calmness and indifference: he

sits

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fits on the shore in safety, and views at a distance those waves and storms which can never injure, because they can never reach him. *All the days of the afflicted are evil; but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.* But this is a feast which only God and our own conscience can invite us to, and to which nothing but innocence can insure us a hearty welcome.

The next thing which offers itself to our consideration, and promises immediate relief from discontent and disquietude, is a firm reliance on and confidence in the goodness of God, who is always able and always willing to relieve us. He is a God of mercy, and will not afflict us beyond what we are able to bear: he is a God of beneficence, and will make a way for us to escape. If we languish on the bed of pain and sickness, let us remember

remember that the God of health, in whom are the issues of life and death, is always able to restore us: if we suffer hunger and thirst in the barren desert of poverty and affliction, let us call to mind that he is the Master of the whole earth: he who commanded water to flow from the rock, will he not quench your thirst? he who adorned with such transcendent beauty even the lilies of the field, will he not cloath you also? O ye of little faith!

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And to this firm reliance on the divine goodness, therefore, we should be careful to add resignation, humility, and above all, devotion: *when I am in heaviness*, says David, *I will call upon God*. To impart our sorrows, to pour our griefs into the bosom of a friend, always gives relief and consolation: and to whom can

we

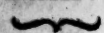
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we better impart them, than to that God who is so able and ready to remove them: what friend shall we chuse who is more ready to assist, than he who is always present with us? Whom have we in heaven but him, and who is there upon earth that we should desire in comparison of him?

After all then, Let every sober thinking being, every rational and religious man consider these things. Let him seriously reflect on the divine attributes, and on his own unworthiness; and when any calamity overtakes him, when he is in any plague or trouble, when he is in sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity, let him thus reason with himself: *Why art thou so vexed, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?* Is not affliction the common lot of mankind,

kind, and the portion of mortality? What right therefore have I to expect that the fixed laws of nature should be reversed for *me*? What have I done to claim *such* a privilege, or to merit *such* an exemption? *Why*, therefore, *art thou so vexed, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me*? I know that the evils which I suffer are tolerable, because others have borne them; I know that there are hopes of deliverance, because others have been delivered from them. Have I not myself often been relieved from worse than these? hath not God himself interposed to save my eyes from tears and my feet from falling? *Why*, therefore, *art thou so vexed, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me*? Can an indulgence in sorrow remove the cause of it; will it not rather add fresh weight to the calamity? When I already
feel

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feel so much pain from the sharpness of the arrow, why should I dip it in poison to increase the smart of it?—Have I received good from the hand of God, and shall I not receive evil also? Have I not had more happiness than I expected, and infinitely more than I ever deserved? Have I not committed a thousand errors which I might have avoided? Have I not omitted a thousand duties which I ought to have performed? If my soul is vexed, therefore, it should be vexed for its own failings; if it is disquieted, it should be disquieted for its own guilt; not for what it suffers, but for what it merits; not for the afflictions it has undergone, but for the miseries which it deserves. *Turn then unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord, instead of punishing, hath rewarded thee: thou hast led thyself into dangers, and yet he of his infinite goodness, if thou*
relieft

relieft on him, shall make thee to dwell
in safety. Put thy trust therefore in
him : for in spite of all thy errors, thy
infirmities, thy follies, and thy sins, thou
shalt yet thank him, *who is the help of thy
countenance, and thy God.*

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